

BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

JULY-AUGUST 2005



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Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

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THE FRONT COVER

L. B. Lent's New York Circus toured from 1868 to 1875 and again in 1877.

This lithograph was used during 1870. Image courtesy of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

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CHS dues notices and *Bandwagon* subscription notices were sent in May. If you have not as yet sent your payment please do so at once.

This is the last *Bandwagon* you will receive if payment is not received by September 20, 2005.

CORRECTION

The Ubangi article in the May-June *Bandwagon* contained some errors. The Ubangi group on Ringling-

Barnum returned to Africa at the end of the 1930 season. There were no Ubangis on Ringling-Barnum in 1931.

In 1932 two different groups of Ubangis were on tour. One was on Ringling-Barnum and one on Al G. Barnes.

Additional information on the

After 35 years work ...

Circus in Australia:

Australian-American Interaction, 1849-1960

Compiled by Mark St Leon, MA (Hons) CHS 3022

This work catalogues the histories of all known visits to Australia of American circuses and wild west shows and all known circuses active in America. It also documents the careers of famous Australian circus artists who 'made good' in American circus and vaudeville, such as Con Colleano, May Wirth, the St Leons, the Honeys and the Ashtons.

The work is illustrated with contemporary posters, photographs and other illustrations, some of which have not been seen in more than a century. Some will be presented in full colour. Partial itineraries of visiting American circuses are given. The work is extensively annotated and indexed.

This is a valuable reference work for libraries, collectors and circus historians. The edition is limited 200 copies.

Projected publication date: January 2006

For further details and to reserve your copy, please contact me at markstleon@bigpond.com or write as follows:

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Ubangis will appear in a future *Bandwagon*.

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Advise the Editor if you have an address change. It then be changed on our mailing list. It is important that you advise promptly so you will not miss an issue of *Bandwagon*.



SECRETS OF THE SIDESHOWS

Joe Nickell

"If there's a more incredibly thorough—or more thoroughly incredible—book out there on the past, present and future of the midway, I don't know it."

—James Taylor, author of *James Taylor's Shocked and Amazed: On & Off the Midway*

"Ever since I saw Penn and Teller 'eat' fire and pontificate on the circus sideshow, I have been curious to learn more about it, not only the history and culture of the sideshow, but the secrets themselves! Nickell delivers brilliantly."—Michael Shermer, author of *Why People Believe Weird Things*

"Nickell traces the history of the sideshows from the individual beggars and street performers of the Middle Ages to the more elaborate multi-performered stage productions and shares the secrets of the shows. Nickell takes us inside the world of fire-eaters, sword-swallowers, jugglers, snake-handlers and magicians to explain the illusions and oddities we may have puzzled over, but never fully understood."—Robert A. Baker, author of *They Call It Hypnosis*

Secrets of the Sideshows is an engaging exploration of the history and marvels of the midway. From the tricks of ancient Egyptian magicians to the wonders of London's eighteenth-century Bartholomew Fair to the golden age of P. T. Barnum's sideshows, he reveals the structure of the shows, specific methods behind the performances, and showmen's tactics for recruiting performers and attracting crowds.

Joe Nickell, once a carnival pitchman, then a magician, private detective, and investigative writer, is senior research fellow of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and writes the "Investigative Files" column for *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine. He is the author of numerous books, including *Real-Life X-Files* and *The Mystery Chronicles*.

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The Ups and Downs of George Washington Smith

PART ONE

By Robert J. Loeffler

This article is dedicated to the memory of George Washington Smith who successfully climbed the staff ladder of The Greatest Show on Earth, in spite of a dreadful handicap. Sometimes he spoke ill of the circus but the words were just the evil of his malady overcoming his natural appreciation of the circus. It is also dedicated to a very fine young man, Normand Andrew Charette.

The Ringling-Barnum Circus has had a number general managers; the subject of this treatise is one of them. As a keen observer, he knew the workings of the Big Show forwards and backwards. He was not the innovator Arthur M. Concello, his successor, was, but he managed the lot in an efficient and capable manner. George Washington Smith was intelligent, bright, and caring. He possessed a photographic memory which permitted him to carry out his duties easily. Slowly, however, he drifted into the dark cloud of alcoholism as he struggled with increased responsibilities as he climbed the circus ladder.

I first met George Smith as a young lad. My father was a newspaper man so Smith invited us to tour the circus lot each time the Ringling Circus came to town. I was impressed at what I saw in the man and was equally interested that his mother and two sisters lived in my hometown, Worcester, Massachusetts. He was a Worcester boy! Smith's father had died when he was quite young, leaving him without the guidance and counseling of a father figure. I lost contact with him as college and graduate studies kept me far from the circus.

Smith and a close chum's exposure to the life of the theater in Worcester may also have contributed to his



George W. Smith, 1893-1986, circus manager extraordinaire. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise ceded.

unfortunate illness. After joining the world of spangles and tassels, he probably first drank after working hours, but within time his craving for alcohol became more intense as more responsibilities were heaped upon his shoulders and he began drinking while on the job. Like many alcoholics, he was able to conceal his addiction at first, but eventually it became overpowering. Some may say that Smith doesn't deserve a story of his life or career, but he accomplished many good things for the Ringling Circus. He didn't have the benefit of treatments which are available today. Henry Ringling North often spoke kindly of him. Earl Chapin May wrote these kind words about Smith:

"After 1 p.m. of each circus day the son of a Massachusetts landscape gardener begins to assume authority with the Ringling-Barnum enterprise. The son is a tall, smooth faced, good-looking fellow, whose dark hair waves towards the tent peaks during moments of tramping emergencies. Yet the owner of the hair is always calm. George Washington Smith is the owner's name. He looks like a rising young banker and is responsible for twelve acres of circus (after Car 1 boards the outgoing first section or flying squadron train) until the canvas city is loaded at night in the rail yards. In other words, George gets it off the lot."

Another more recent historian has written: "George W. Smith remained as general manager, the person in charge of making the daily, on-the-spot, nitty-gritty decisions during the stay at the Sarasota quarters in the winter and later on the road."

George Washington Smith was the son of Edwin J. Smith, a gardener, who was born in Scotland and Margaret (Maggie) A. Balbender, also a native of Scotland. They were members of the Episcopalian faith. Son George Washington Smith was born on February 22, 1893, at Southboro, Massachusetts, not far from Worcester. George was obviously named for the father of his country, since his birthday was on the 22nd of February.

George's sister, Jane Smith Hixon, was born in Worcester in 1902. Stanley Hixon and family operated the Hixon Nursery in Leicester (located west of Worcester) and in Worcester. Jane passed away on April 8, 1957.

Worcester, like many other New England cities at the turn of the century, boasted a theater where plays,

minstrel shows, vaudeville productions, burlesque, and other types of live entertainment were presented. As time passed, the teen-aged Smith and a friend sought employment. They were hired as ticket takers and stage hands at the Worcester Theater. Neither position demanded much intelligence, but Smith enjoyed greeting patrons, itinerants and stage personalities who graced the stage of this famous theater.

Smith remained at this job for a few years and then developed a yen for the roving life after seeing a circus that came to Worcester. He and his chum soon were hired to work in the cookhouse of the Forepaugh-Sells Brothers Circus in 1910. He moved to the Barnum and Bailey Circus after Forepaugh-Sells was taken off the road after the 1911 season. At first he waited tables and then became an usher, neither of which provided him with much earning capacity, but as long as it was circus, it was okay with George W. Smith. He was a willing and diplomatic worker who not only did his own duties well but observed and studied the myriad of other circus tasks. Earl Chapin May relates that Smith first was a flunky, but he also doubled as an usher in the big top, became the show's assistant steward, then a reserved seat and concert ticket seller. The seasons passed and before long he was one of the front door men, an important post in the circus.

Smith's 1914 contract with the Barnum show was signed on November 12, 1913. His job was "to sell or take tickets as may be directed by the management." His pay was \$15.00 a week.

This handsome and pleasant young man possessed the air of a businessman, banker, or attorney. One circus fan described him as a true gentleman. His job demanded a keen mind, one that could handle figures. In 1917, he married Doris Davis, a performer with Barnum & Bailey. By 1920 he and Lawrence Woerell worked the front door for Ringling-Barnum; both men were congenial and worked well together.

Earl May wrote: "Smith exhibited a rare genius for separating the sheep from the goats among the big show's patrons. He had an uncanny ability in appraising ages. He could

tell whether a child-in-arms was entitled to entrance at half-rate or full-rate, could promptly determine whether a gate crasher was entitled to a circus courtesy or was merely what is known in the profession as a chiseler.

"George Smith, in charge of the front door, has the biggest and hardest job of its kind in the circus world, yet he handled it as if it was child's play."

Smith continued with the combined shows. His contract for the 1920 season read, "to sell and take tickets as instructed. To make announcements when required. To assist about the lot, keeping streets open when possible; and to be generally useful." His pay was now \$30.00 a week.

In due time he became front door superintendent. He worked, officially, only from noon until 10 p.m., but his brain was working all the time. He learned, in the course of several seasons, where each wagon was spotted on the lot, what it carried and weighed and what kind of a team or tractor hauled it, where it was loaded on the circus train, and other details. The front door superintendent was interested in all aspects of the circus business. Smith remained in the post until 1929, when he was pro-

George Smith on the front door of Ringling-Barnum in 1925.



moted to assistant to the General Superintendent, the genial and friendly Carl T. Hathaway. The *Billboard* commented that: "He merited his promotion through the years of faithful service. A bright future is predicted for him."

Smith almost became manager of Sells Floto in 1930. After the incredibly successful 1929 touring featuring Tom Mix, Floto manager Zack Terrell demanded a large salary increase in January 1930. John Ringling, who became Terrell's boss when he purchased the Floto show along with the four other American Circus Corporation troupes in September 1929, responded by firing Terrell and appointing Smith Floto show manager. Terrell, seeing the handwriting on the wall, relented in his salary demand, and returned to his position as Floto manager for 1930, at his 1929 salary one would gather.

In 1932 John Ringling lost control of the circus bearing his name. Samuel W. Gumpertz became senior vice president and general manager through the 1937 season.

After being fired by Gumpertz after the 1933 season, Smith joined the staff of Madison Square Garden where he was put in charge of the front door. He had previously worked at the Manhattan landmark during the winter in the 1920s and was friends with legendary Garden manager George L. Rickard. He remained with the Garden until 1936.

In 1937, an odd turn of events, Smith went to work for the American Federation of Actors which was trying to unionize circus workingmen. Smith took this position with the union because of his deep resentment at Gumpertz for firing him.

Billboard commented: "Ralph Whitehead, executive secretary of the AFA and George Smith, an AFA organizer, departed for Washington, D. C., on Sunday to work out union details with Sam. W. Gumpertz, general manager of Ringling-Barnum. Circus, playing a three-day engagement there May 17-19, 1937."

After the Washington meeting, Whitehead announced that Gumpertz had informed him that he had called a meeting of the entire circus personnel in the Big Top for Tuesday, May 19, at which time,

employees would be asked to join the AFA. A contract between union and circus was announced on May 31, 1937. It was speculated at the time and later that Gumpertz supported the agreement because he knew the Ringling family in the person of John Ringling North would soon be taking over control of the circus, and he desired to make the transition as difficult as possible.

The New York Times carried the story: "CIRCUS SIGNS LABOR PACT."

"The American Federation of Actors announced yesterday that it had signed a closed shop agreement with Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Inc. The agreement was signed in Philadelphia by Samuel W. Gumpertz, representative of the circus, and by Ralph Whitehead, representative of the AFA. The agreement was signed following several weeks of negotiations in which the support of the entire American Federation was pledged to Mr. Gumpertz and Mr. Whitehead by William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor in a personal interview.

"Under the agreement, the announcement explained, more than 1,000 performers and workers in 17 departments of the circus will be benefitted by an increase wage scale and many improved working conditions."

The pact was heralded by union members across the country, and many in the circus world believed it would result in future benefits, but "the honeymoon" did not last very long.

On June 2, 1937 Whitehead issued the following, "To whom it may concern. This letter will serve as official authorization that Mr. George W. Smith is employed as organizer for the American Federation of Actors, circus employees' division."

Smith's tenure with the union was short. On June 28, 1937, Whitehead wrote Smith at his home in Worcester, Massachusetts, "Due to your inactivity and failure to carry out instructions with respect to the organizing of the Hagenbeck-Wallace and Cole Bros. circuses, our council at its last session insisted that I remove you from the payroll."



Carl Hathaway and George Smith in 1932.

In spite of his union activities, Smith came back into the Ringling fold in late 1937 when John Ringling North, who now controlled the destiny of the Greatest Show on Earth,

appointed him manager of the Ringling-owned Al G. Barnes-Sells-Floto Circus, seceding Sylvester L. "Buster" Cronin who had managed the Barnes show since the American Circus Corporation had purchased it in late 1928. On December 27, 1937 North wrote Cronin a letter that made clear Cronin's days were numbered, "This letter will be presented to you by Mr. G. W. Smith, whom we are sending out to represent the Circus City Zoological Gardens Inc.

"While Mr. Smith is sent out to co-operate with you, we want you to understand his authority is in no way limited.

"Any cooperation you can give Mr. Smith will be appreciated by him and the corporation."

Handbill issued by the American Federation of Actors in 1937.

Monster Circus Mass Meeting

ATTENTION! RINGLING BROTHERS BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS EMPLOYEES:-

The American Federation of Actors, a national organization operating in all cities from coast to coast, and embracing circuses, carnivals, fairs, night clubs, vaudeville, etc., is ready to extend the facilities of its gigantic organization to promote your economic and social welfare.

The Wagner National Labor Relations Act guarantees you the right to choose your representatives for the purpose of collective bargaining. Never before in the history of the labor movement has the government ever guaranteed the workers the right to affiliate with a labor organization, free from coercion by their employers.

At this important meeting we shall demonstrate through mass attendance, our challenge to the circus owners that we must have higher wages and decent living conditions. The abuses long practiced by the Management are well-known to you. This is your opportunity to affiliate with an organization that carries with it the largest membership in the entertainment world.

BE SURE TO ATTEND. BRING YOUR FELLOW WORKERS WITH YOU. REMEMBER THE DATE! REMEMBER THE PLACE!

To-Night, Thursday, May 13, 1937.

STARTING AT 10 O'CLOCK

Ridgewood Grove Stadium

Palmetto St. and St. Nicholas Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

The January 8, 1938 *Billboard* gave details of the promotion: "George W. Smith, presented credentials signed by John Ringling North, has taken over the management of the Al G. Barnes Sells-Floto Circus. S. L. Cronin has resigned as manager, January 1 to become manager of the new Col. Tim McCoy Wild West show Mr. Smith put the blacksmith shop in operation, with Red Forbes, in charge, and it was stated that the paint shop would open January 10, with Dan Parker in charge. Asked as to probable changes in staff and personnel, Mr. Smith stated that there was no intention to make any drastic changes."

It was rumored that Cronin was canned for pocketing monies received for leasing Barnes animals to film companies.

Shortly after taking over the Barnes show, Smith wrote his old boss Carl Hathaway on January 15, saying in part, "I toured quarters yesterday, and some of the equipment here is absolutely junk, especially as to some saddles, cages, wheels etc. The train looks pretty tough right now, but guess it will come out O. K. in the end."

On January 16 1938 Smith again wrote Hathaway, "Well after two weeks of work find that we have the following work completed. Eight wagons through the paint department, eight more including two cages. Blacksmith has eight wagons down and working on same, including the two new steel frames he is putting on cages, sills floors and uprights all gone in olds. So cheaper to put in steel frame. Had to buy eleven new springs for four different cages. Train department finished five flats and one elephant car, with side frames, and working on the seventh car.

"I am enclosing pay roll sheet for past week, looks bad, but Carl this work that is being done just had to be taken care of, and will have same in pretty good shape by the time we take to the road. . . .

"Presume you are pretty busy down where you are, and won't bother you with things that don't seem



The idle Ringling-Barnum ticket wagons in Scranton following the 1938 strike.

important, as I said before I am going along in the routine that you and I worked [out] together for years, and I guess I have kind of surprised the gang around here by not having to ask them what this is and what that is for, and who does this and who does that. . . .

"Have not been writing to John North, as he did not tell me to write to him, and I figure that you are handling the show end of it, and that he is pretty busy attending to a lot of other details, but if you think I should write to John, and that he would be expecting me to, I will do that. I figure that as long as I get the information to you that you will advise him of it."

When Carl Hathaway died suddenly on January 25, 1938, Smith was named general manager of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Smith must have keenly felt the loss of his mentor and friend. Their few surviving letters show a mutual admiration and respect for one another. While most of their correspondence concerns the logistics and physical side of the circus, it also contains the typical gossip two buddies would exchange and the easy familiarity of close friends. Hathaway signed one letter "Your old pardner."

Billboard told the story: "SMITH SUCCEEDS HATHAWAY"

"Appointed Gen Mgr. R-B Show, Austin takes over post on Barnes-Floto-has been general agent.

"Sarasota, Fla., Feb. 5.-John Ringling North on Thursday appointed George W. Smith as general manager, succeeding Carl T. Hathaway, who died here last week. Smith's post as manager of the Al. G. Barnes and Sells-Floto Circus will be taken by J.

B. Austin, general agent of that show and a Barnes man for 10 years.

"Smith was slated to leave Barnes quarters at Baldwin Park, California and fly to Sarasota to take over the Big Show. Smith's entire circus career has been under the Ringling

banner. . . .

"In 1920 he was made front-door superintendent of the Big Show, and in 1928 he became assistant manager under Hathaway. He served in that post until 1933, when Hathaway was replaced by Gumpertz."

The *White Tops* carried this story: "Circus Fans as well as circus people were pleased when the announcement was made by John Ringling North of the appointment of Smith to the general managership of the Ringling show, succeeding the late Carl Hathaway. As such he has complete charge of the Ringling and Barnes outfits.

"In the comparatively short span of 28 years, the 45-year-old man has risen from duty in a circus cook tent to a position where he is in charge of two great circuses. . . .

"Because Smith has risen from the ranks, he is without a doubt the most versatile man in the business. He is completely familiar with every phase of the work. This, coupled with his engaging personality, makes all of us who follow the big tops appreciate his worth."

After Smith was appointed general manager, friends flooded him with letters of congratulations, sometimes inquiring about jobs. George H. Degnon's letter was typical: "While I was very sorry to hear of the passing of our old friend Carl Hathaway, permit me to congratulate you on your appointment as General Manager of the Big Show, and I trust that 1938 season will be a most pleasant and profitable one.

"In the event that anything should open ahead or back, where I might fit I surely would appreciate it, George, if you will bear me in mind."

Smith could not have taken over Ringling-Barnum at a more tumultuous time. From the Madison Square Garden opening where the

workingmen struck and tuxedo-clad audience members helped with the rigging to that terrible day in Scranton, Pennsylvania when the union shut the show down, the tour was marred with labor trouble.

In late June, Ringling-Barnum closed as a result of the infamous strike against the show at Scranton, Pennsylvania, a strong union town sympathetic to the workingmen, on June 22, 1938. The *Billboard* of June 25 recounted the Big Show's difficulties prior to that event: "STRIKE on R-B—67 baggage stockmen walk out after workers asked to be paid off. Trouble starts at Toledo following dismissal of scores of workers at Lima and Fort Wayne. New help recruited—air line on cars cut. Causes 4:45 matinee at Erie. The incident wasn't mentioned by the Erie press. George W. Smith, general manager, was quoted as saying: 'I have been around the Big Show for a great many years but I never saw such a hectic day as the one just closing,' he said as he watched the last of circus property being loaded at the New York Central yards preparing to moving from Erie to Buffalo, N.Y., for a stand, June 16. In a 24-hour period the circus faced a walk-out of 67 baggage stock handlers, a 5-hour train delay when it was found that air lines on the show's rolling stock had been cut on 12 cars, a matinee that didn't start until 4:45 and found the night crowd so jammed in front of the main entrance when the performance ended that an exit through the menagerie sidewalk had to be provided."

The Scranton strike began on June 22 and ended late in June, 1938, when the show trains made their way east to Washington, D. C. and finally to Sarasota. In the Potomac



A large billboard for the show following the Ringling features being added to the Barnes show.

rail yards of the Pennsylvania Railroad in Washington, Smith commented that the Al. G. Barnes Circus had "leased some of the Ringling acts and performers and would introduce them as presented through arrangement with Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus." This permitted much of the Ringling show to complete the 1938 tour. The baggage stock was sent to Peru, Indiana. As soon as the show returned to winter quarters Smith quickly went to work planning a cut down version of the big show to join the Barnes-Sells-Floto Circus and finish the season.

The Sarasota winter quarters became a bee hive of activity once the trains arrived in early July. Smith was in charge of winter quarters along with assistant manager Ed Kelly, and others. Leonard Aylesworth was in charge of tents, replacing veteran William Hobson who died during the season.

The train with the Ringling equipment and personnel to be added to the Barnes show at Redfield, South Dakota left Sarasota on July 10. It consisted of 1 stock car, 14 flats and 6 coaches. There were 26 wagons, 3 Mack trucks used to carry the big

The combined Ringling-Barnes show on a lot in 1938.

top, a smoke wagon, a gilly wagon and 2 Catipiller tractors. The complete cookhouse, and all the Ringling-Barnum seating was sent. Four elephants, a giraffe and 4 cages for the Terrell Jacobs wild animals were on the train.

The size of the new show, was about 68 cars. The Barnes itinerary was re-routed to play out

the planned Ringling 1938 route. It was felt that public opinion had turned against unreasonable union tactics and the situation could be dealt with. Smith replaced J. B. Austin, the pre-combine manager of Al G. Barnes-Sells-Floto Circus, as manager of the new show. J. B. Donahue continued as general traffic manager, and John Brazel became manager of advance car No. 1. A Ringling Advance Car was added, managed by Frederick "Babe" Boudinot. The entire Big Show press crew was added. The *Billboard* commented that: "BARNES-SELLS-FLOTO TITLE CHANGED. RINGLING-BARNUM & BAILEY FEATURES INCLUDED IN NEW BILLING."

"R-B acts, department heads, big top, menagerie tent and 4,500 seats sent from Sarasota to enlarge show. Frank Buck joining later. The train carrying the equipment, animals and personnel to enlarge the Barnes Show left Sarasota for Redfield, South Dakota to join the Barnes-Sells-Floto unit which would arrive in town for a Sunday off date on July 10 with performers scheduled for the next day. The off day would give a chance to make the reorganization work as it was a large and difficult undertaking.

"Sarasota, FL, July 9 Feature acts, attractions and equipment of the Ringling-Barnum Circus left here on



a 21-car train on Monday, bound for Redfield, S.D., and the Al G. Barnes-Sells-Floto Circus. General manager, George W. Smith of R-B, leaving with the train, said that the Ringling-owned Barnes show has 'leased' the Big Show features included and would introduce them as presented through arrangements with Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey. Smith also said that Frank Buck would also rejoin the Barnes show, probably in Chicago, as would Roland Butler and Frank Braden of the Ringling press department. Mr. Smith planned to return to Sarasota after delivering the big show attractions to Redfield, South Dakota."

The personnel of the Barnes show had no advance warning of the Ringling-Barnum arrival. With the Ringling department heads taking over the Barnes show bosses were fired. It was much like what happened in 1919 when the Ringling and Barnum shows were combined.

Smith's drinking got the best of him in Atlanta on November 8, 1938 when he badly mishandled a situation which led to a written reprimand from John Ringling North the next day: "Last year about this time you wanted to come back with the circus and I was most anxious to have you. I sent you to California to the Barnes Show and after Carl Hathaway's death, I phoned you immediately and offered you the chance of a life time, which at first you were afraid to accept. You have worked very hard and diligently, and I have been most proud of you, and I want to continue to feel that way. I spoke to you two days ago and thought that would be the end of it. Do not forget that I have stood by you in everything and will continue to do so. Remember that you owe me something too. Last night, while people's clothes were burning and circus property was being destroyed, you stood outside the circus car and made wise cracks. You know that when you are yourself that is the last thing in the world you would do. I make this suggestion to you for your own good, and for the good of the organization: that you start drinking only two highballs a day or go back to those coca colas which you were drinking last winter in Sarasota. The



George Smith in 1940.

manager of the circus should be admired and respected at all times."

Drinking had become more and more a problem for Smith. Many times he was unable to do his work. In 1938 alcoholism was almost universally believed to be a failure of will power and chronic alcoholics were seen as morally defective. Drunks rarely moderated their drinking or stopped altogether once they developed the habit of over indulgence. Alcoholics Anonymous, which developed the first successful recovery program for alcoholics, was only three years old at the time and had fewer than 100 members. The American Medical Association did not classify alcoholism as a disease until 1955, and to this day, many otherwise intelligent and compassionate people continue to see it as a lack of will power rather than the progressive, chronic and fatal disease that it is.

While North's heart was in the right place, his suggestion that Smith cut back to "two highballs a day" was doomed to fail because, in general, once an alcoholic has the first drink, something chemically occurs in his brain which leads him to desire more and more liquor without regard for the consequences. One of the great insights of Alcoholics Anonymous was that a real alcoholic loses control of his drinking once he experiences this change in his body chemistry triggered by the first

drink. It is often called an allergic reaction.

Smith's 1938 federal income tax return survives. He made \$6245.83, equal to \$80,393.21 in today's dollars. On the line asking his occupation, he wrote "Showman."

Many projects were undertaken at winter quarters for the upcoming 1939 season, and Smith's knowledge and know-how were key to their success. One of the main winter quarter projects was a new public bathroom. Large clumps of palms and other tropical shrubbery were put in place around the quarters.

In addition, a new big top was built that was more circular than in the past with box seats in the center section. The canvas was painted blue in the upper center part of the tent. The shop crew worked on building new 50-foot ring curbs. In mid-March, the Globe Poster Company of Chicago was awarded a large printing contract for 1939 billing needs. With the increased use of trucks in the advance, the show used only a single advance railway car. The elimination of all baggage stock in 1938 enabled the circus to drop seven stockcars, but Smith soon realized that additional motorized equipment necessitated the use of two more flats than used in 1938. To replace baggage stock Ringling used four large and four small caterpillar tractors and two low boy trailers to move the biggest tractors.

New wagons in 1939 included eight steel air-conditioning wagons (numbered 161-168). The new big top was supported by only four center poles rather than the former six so that the tent was a 210 feet round with three 60-foot middle sections. Improved lighting within the tent was the chief benefit. The usual cluster of lights around the poles was replaced with individual vertical poles carrying strong voltage lamps between the rings and the hippodrome track.

Smith's drinking problem again came to a head in the fall of 1941. John and Henry North had compassion for him and arranged for him to check into the Keeley Institute, an alcohol treatment center in Dwight, Illinois. Smith's condition must have been severe for him to have left the

show with about a month and a half of the tour remaining. On October 9, 1941 John North wrote him at Keeley, "I have today received a report from the staff physician about you and it is very encouraging indeed. Buddy and I both are looking forward to your early return." North wrote him again on October 19, this time showing a touch of concern, "Hope you are getting along okay and am wondering if everything is alright as I have had no letter from you personally since you left. I assume you received the letter I wrote you a week or so ago."

Sending an alcoholic employee to treatment rather than firing him for his drinking is common today, but was an enlightened attitude in 1941. Perhaps the North brothers recalled their uncle Henry Ringling's excessive drinking which led to a suicide attempt. Whatever their motivation, giving Smith another chance indicated how valuable he was to the organization.

Smith returned to the big show prior to the opening of the 1942 season. However his treatment at the Keeley Institute was not successful and he was again drinking. The Norths had finally had enough, and in the spring of 1942 they pulled the plug.

On April 6, 1942 Henry North wrote Smith, "As of April 3, you have been discharged from our employ and the New York office has been so advised.

"You may be sure that it gives me no pleasure to inform you of this fact, but it is a situation which you have brought entirely upon yourself. It is useless for me to go into detail recalling to you that you have been warned that a persistence in your neglect of duty would result in your discharge from our services, or to recall to you the chances you have had and the great expense we have gone to. This is final, and arrangements have already been made for your replacement."

The April 18, 1942 *Billboard* reported that George W. Smith had been replaced by Art Concello of the Flying Concellos trapeze act. This announcement came out of New York on April 11. Henry Ringling North confirmed that Smith was out and Concello was in but he gave no

reason other than to say, "the report is substantially correct."

Years later Henry Ringling North recounted Smith's discharge in his book *The Circus Kings, Our Circus Family Story*: "My troubles began early. The first of these was over George Smith, our general manager. George was an old circus hand and a dear friend who knew all the intricate technicalities of moving the circus army. But infirmities gradually overcame him and he kept getting worse. Finally it reached a point where he could no longer handle the show.

"We were on our way from Sarasota to New York with the great, long trains and had just reached the Jersey terminal, where we had to transfer the coaches and equipment to railroad ferries to get across the Hudson. It became evident to me that George was in no condition to handle the complicated operation and get the show up in the Garden. So I sent for Arthur Concello and asked him if he thought he could take over. Arthur, who is a confident fellow, said, 'I am sure I can.' 'All right,' I said, 'you've got the job.'

"That is how the greatest aerialist became general manager of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Combined Show."

David Lewis Hammarstrom in *Big Top Boss, John Ringling North and the Circus*, also writes about the

Arthur Concello, who succeeded Smith as Ringling-Barnum manager.



woes heaped upon the circus by Smith's malady:

"In a way, John's season of woes began during the 1942 New York engagement when six days before opening night, he fired his general manager, George Smith. Art Concello, who succeeded Smith, remembers that Smith had a drinking problem and that North felt uneasy trusting the show to Smith's hands while he was away for extended periods. . . .

"In fact, since taking on the running of the show in 1938, the North boys had made a concerted effort to help Smith straighten himself out, and they had put up with a lot on occasions.

"The Norths had nurtured Smith along for another season. Finally, John either could no longer deal with the problem or he saw superior management material in Art Concello. Nonetheless, George Smith had a strong following and was generally held in high regard by the Ringling family [Edith, widow of Charles Ringling and Aubrey Haley, widow of Richard Ringling], having worked his way up the Ringling ladder since starting out as a kid in the cookhouse with the Forepaugh-Sells show. Because the press was not told why Smith was abruptly dismissed, its reports tended to imply a lack of good cause for the action, and this caused considerable doubt on the management style of John North."

Concello recalled Smith's firing in a 1973 interview with Tom Parkinson: "Anyway, they [the Norths] had a problem with George and dammit he's a good guy and everything, and he just commenced to get drunk. Some guys could drink a quart and you'd never know it, but George would fall down [and cause a ruckus] and, of course, George proceeded to get drunk [on the train]. Anyway we got to New York, and John North and Henry called me in [and] says, 'Hey, we've got a problem.' 'Have you?' 'Can you [Concello] unload the trains and get it in the Garden?' I said, 'Sure, that's no problem.' So, anyway, they called George and says, 'Hey, you can't do anything, can't go any place this year.'"

Smith's firing made Arthur Concello's career. Concello was that

rarest of commodities, a gifted performer who turned out to be an even more gifted manager. Doubtless, his ambition, intelligence and cunning would have eventually propelled him to greater things than the triple somersault no matter what the circumstance, but if not for Smith's drinking, it would not have happened when it did or the way it did. Perhaps if circumstances had been different Concello would have become a Shrine circus producer, an agent, a booker, or even a vendor to the circus industry.

Smith landed on his feet, securing a position with the Army War Show, a railroad-transported exhibition put on by the War Department to show off American military technology and raise money for Army Emergency Relief. It was a good marriage. Smith needed a job and the Army needed someone with the expertise to organize, execute and manage the undertaking.

Soon after leaving Ringling-Barnum, Smith wrote the Army Quartermaster Department: "For the past eighteen years I have been general manager of Ringling Bros. and Barnum-Bailey Circus supervising and handling the moving of this organization from city to city during its seasonal tours.

"Starting May 1 of this year I will be at liberty and would like to obtain a place in the Army where my knowledge will serve the country to the greatest advantage. I don't wish to go into too many details here about my ability, [but] I would like to point out some of the more salient factors which I believe, from a patriotic stand-point will do my country the greatest good.

"The Ringling-Barnum Circus travels on 100 railroad cars carrying 67 trucks and 267 wagons. The workmen personnel averages 900. In each city we exhibited, some 167 a season, we gave two performances a day. It was necessary to take down the tents, raise and equip them with seats and rigging etc. This all came under my direct supervision so I feel



The Army War Show in Chicago in 1942.

fully qualified to handle any army movement of comparable size and do it with circus dispatch, which means on time. There are many other factors why I feel qualified to apply for this position, but principally I want to serve my country in a capacity where I can do the most good. The years I have handled the many details with the great Ringling Circus speak for themselves. I will greatly appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible, for I am anxious to serve and knowing you can use me having arranged my affairs to be free the first of May."

The Army War Show was a big affair, moving on 66 cars, 31 coaches, eight baggage cars, 11 box cars, 13 gondolas, one flat car and two stock cars.

It was a great spectacle, displaying a wide variety of tanks, armored cars, trucks, jeeps and artillery. A stadium show, it opened at Baltimore, Maryland, on June 12, 1942, and toured through December 20 when it closed in Atlanta. One highlight of the season was a September 2-12 date at Chicago's Soldier Field.

Smith performed a superb job operating and directing the Army War Show. He knew every detail of every wagon, vehicle, rigging and details of loading and unloading vehicles which he had mastered in his years with the circus.

After the 1942 season, John North's five-year management agreement with his Aunt Edith Ringling and his cousin's widow Aubrey Haley, who between them owned two-thirds

of the circus, expired. Robert Ringling, son of Edith and Charles Ringling, became president of the organization, and James Haley, husband of Aubrey Haley, became vice-president. North was out.

Robert Ringling brought Smith back as general manager, knowing that Concello was a North man through and through. The circus made

lemonade out of the lemon by creating the story that it had "loaned" Smith to the Army War Show as a patriotic gesture.

The size of the show was smaller than the 90-car train of 1942. The 1943 train usually moved in two sections but not always. In order to do this the air conditioning system was dropped, eliminating two flat cars. The Norman Bel Geddes designed midway pylons and other decorative gadgets were also dropped, which freed more flat car space. The biggest cut was the elimination of the menagerie tent, and Gargantua and Toto traveled in a single air-conditioned cage placed under a small canopy top between the marquee and big top. In all, eleven flats were dropped, along with three stock cars. The biggest building project was the construction of a new Liberty bandwagon by Bill Yeske and his crew for the Hold Your Horses spec.

There was a new big top; gone were the blue colored tops used during 1940. In the backyard was erected a huge canopy to shelter the formation of spec participants in inclement weather prior to entry to the big top.

The shortage of manpower was a major problem along with the difficulty in obtaining necessary materials for the smooth operation of vehicles and other equipment.

The circus pulled in \$14,000 in war bond purchases on April 9th at Madison Square Garden, and although handled by financial officials, George Smith was often consulted, and, of course, was advised of progress on the war bond project.

The 1943 season turned out to be the calm before the storm. The 1944

season progressed smoothly until July 6 when the disastrous big top fire occurred in Hartford, Connecticut. The show arrived in Hartford late from Providence, Rhode Island, on Wednesday, July 5, in spite of the distance between the two towns being only 90 miles. The matinee was missed, but the evening show went off without a hitch to a capacity crowd.

On Thursday afternoon, July 6th there were an unusual number of children in the audience as schools had just finished for the summer in late June. It was at this performance that the unthinkable happened - FIRE!

Billboard proclaimed: "As sorrow steeped personnel of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus today [July 8] awaited further developments in the aftermath of the fire horror which struck at the Big One here during Thursday's matinee snuffing out lives at the local count of 152 and injuring over 207 spectators, most of which were women and children.

"Friday morning [July 7] the Police Court announced arrests on charges of [involuntary] manslaughter of circus officials: James A. Haley, vice president; George W. Smith, general manager, in charge of everyday operations of the circus; Leonard Aylesworth boss canvas man; Edward Versteeg, chief electrician; and David W. 'Deacon' Blanchfield, chief wagon and tractor man [and William Caley, boss seatman, and seatman Samuel Clark]. Haley and Smith were held in \$15,000 bail each and the others in \$10,000 for a hearing July 19th."

State Police Commissioner and State Fire warden, Edward J. Hickey called and questioned a number of circus officials, employees as well as others who were witnesses to the fire. The following testimony between Hickey and circus vice-president James Haley ascertained the whereabouts on that fateful afternoon of circus president, Robert Ringling.

Q. I assume that you stayed on the grounds while the fire was in progress? A. Yes

Q. And you left there some time afterwards? A. I left the show some time afterwards



Robert Ringling

Q. May I ask you where you went? A. I went to the Bond Hotel, I believe.

Q. Did you contact the circus? A. I called Chicago; called Mr. Ringling, our president, to inform him of the fire.

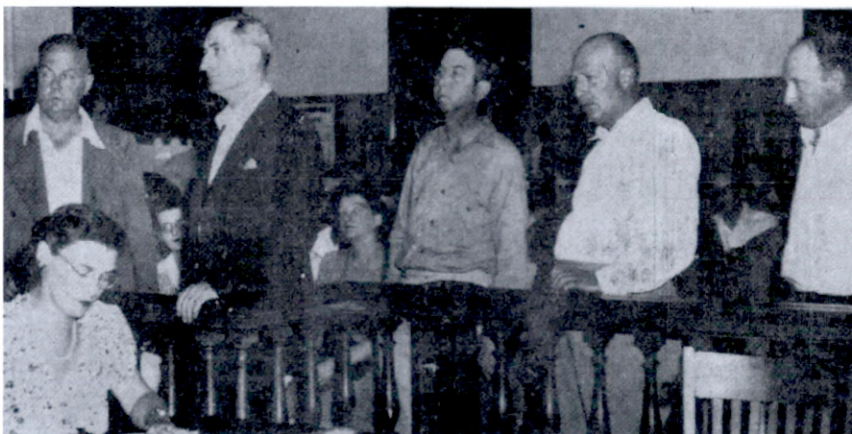
Q. May I have Mr. Ringling's Chicago address? A. 1220 Forrest Avenue, Evansville, Indiana-I mean Illinois.

Q. Evanston or Evansville? Evanston, Illinois? A. Yes, sir.

I think that is all I want today, Mr. Haley; thank you very much.

Then Commissioner Hickey summoned George Washington Smith to State Police Headquarters,

These circus officials, George W. Smith, James A. Haley, Edward Verseeg, Leonard Aylesworth and David Blanchfield, were arraigned in the Hartford police court.



Washington Street, Hartford for an interrogation.

Haley's and Smith's testimony is a part of the 1944 Ringling fire records in the State Archives of the State Library of Connecticut at Hartford. The author thanks the personnel, especially Nancy Shades, of the State Archives for their efficient and friendly assistance while my wife and I poured over the records.

Statement of George W. Smith, accused, taken by Commissioner Hickey.

The Commissioner. Mr. Smith: I take it that is your name. May I have your full name?

The Witness. George W. Smith.

The Commissioner. Your home address?

The Witness. Sarasota, Florida.

The Commissioner. I am State Police Commissioner and State Fire Warden, and under the statutes I am empowered to make investigation as to the causes and other circumstances and origin of fires, and under the statute I am making inquiry into this fire that occurred today.

The Witness. Yes sir.

The Commissioner. Will you please hold up your right hand?

GEORGE W. SMITH, having been sworn by the Commissioner, testified as follows:

BY THE COMMISSIONER:

Q. You are connected with the Barnum & Bailey Circus? A. That's right.

Q. In what capacity? A. General Manager.

Q. General Manager? How long have you been general manager? A. Since 1938.

Q. Can you give me the names of the officers of the Barnum & Bailey? A.

Robert Ringling, president; James Haley, vice president; assistant to the president; Mrs. Aubrey Haley, vice president; Mrs. Charles Ringling, vice president; William P. Dunn, treasurer.

Q. Are you aware of what state that show is incorporate in. A. The state of Delaware

Q. You have been actually general manager since 1938? A. That's right.

Q. May I have the names of the men that are in charge of the following divisions? The boss of the canvasmen? A. Leonard Aylesworth.

Q. The boss of the ushers? A. John Carson.

Q. The boss of the men that set up the seats? A. Leonard Aylesworth.

Q. Are you informed as to the number of employees with the show, exclusive of performers? A. Right.

Q. May I have the number? A. I can give it to you in detail from last night, if you want it?

Q. I'd like it. A. I think I have it here. We get a report from the time-keeper every day. I'll go down the list: Animal Department, 19 men; Cookhouse, 84; Animal act, 4; Trained electricians, 2; Elephant department, 37; Gorillas, 4; Harness maker, 1. Light department, 34; Mechanics, 91; Doctor, 1; Utility, 1; Porters, 30; Property men, 47; Ring stock, 46; Side show, 16. This is just working men, you know, Commissioner. Train department, 33, the men that load and unload the trains. Truck department, 42. Ushers, 49. Wardrobe, 36. Watchmen, 4; that's train watchmen. Canvas department, 89. Total of 588. That is at Providence, Rhode Island, July 4th.

Q. How does that compare with last year's? A. At this time when we were in Hartford, in July, well, I don't think we had quite as many. I'd say around 555, maybe.

Q. 555? A. Yes.

Q. Who is the boss of the ushers? A. John Carson. He's the only man that didn't show up, and he was told to stay



Emmett Kelly, bucket in hand, fighting the flames.

around, but I told them where you could get him, in the car. I figured he went down to the car to get something to eat. He wasn't around.

Q. You mean in getting the men to come here for this hearing? A. That's right.

Q. He was on the grounds today? A. Oh, yes.

Q. He was on the job today? A. Yes sir.

Q. Tell me the duties of the ushers? A. The ushers, there's forty-nine regular ushers that Mr. Carson has. They set up the chairs and they usher to seats. Then we have what we call the utility ushers that come out of the dressing room; there's like sixteen other men come in every day on top of the forty-nine. We always try to have about sixty men in there. That's two men for every section, a man on the gate and a man in the section, every aisle.

The Hartford fire in 1944.



Q. Who is the man that has the time sheet on ushers that were on the job today? A. From the dressing room?

Q. All the ushers. A. John Carson would have the regular ushers and Charlie would have the utility men.

Q. What terms are applied to the men that operate underneath the seats during the performance? A. There's only two seat men under the sets during the performance.

Q. Only two? A. That's right.

Q. Over the entire space? A. No, over each section.

Q. What are they called? A. They're seat men.

Q. They're underneath? A. That's right.

Q. Who sets the buckets underneath the seats? A. Leonard Aylesworth, the boss canvas man, has a man that does that.

Q. How many buckets are assigned to each section? A. I think he has--I wouldn't say, but I figure he should have twenty-four under the grandstand, and what extras he has under the blues.

Q. And two men under each section? A. Not under each section. A section only seats 288, and they run five sections before there's a break. It would be five times 288.

Q. Whose job is it to supply those, buckets, place them on the location and to see that they're filled with water? A. Leonard Aylesworth's department, one of his men does that.

Q. He is the man that is required to do that? A. That's right.

Q. Whose job is it to locate the fire extinguishers? A. Whitey Versteeg, the electrician.

Q. I'm sorry? A. Whitey Versteeg. He's out there in the hall.

Q. As general manager tell me what your duties are? A. Helping the circus in general, transportation, routing, looking after things, see that they're carried out, hiring of the bosses, buying of the materials. Well, everything that makes the circus, I guess I'm supposed to do.

Q. Are you the man that

buys the fire fighting equipment?
A. Yes sir.

Q. Can you tell me what constituted the fire fighting equipment?

A. What we have?

Q. Yes sir. A. Well, on the lot we should have twenty-four fire extinguishers.

Q. You should have twenty-four fire extinguishers? A. That's right.

Q. Do you know the kind? A. Well, they're the tanks, you know. They're inspected every year, and they're charged by our local fire department.

Q. Who inspects them? A. Our local fire department in Sarasota inspects them, and takes them and charges them every year before we come on the road.

Q. When did the show leave Sarasota? A. The road equipment left there on the 29th of May.

Q. Do you know the name of the fire chief down there, the local fire chief? A. Yes, I do, but I can't think of it right now. Chief-I should know him. He spent a summer on the show with me a few years ago.

Q. He is the man that does the inspecting of the fire fighting equipment? A. That's right.

Q. In addition to the buckets and the fire extinguishers, what other equipment have you? A. We have four large water tanks that we use to water our stock and elephants and cookhouse, and everything with. They have a pump on it and a length of hose capable of throwing a stream over the top.

Q. It is an automatic or a hand pump? A. It's a pump that works off the motor on the car.

Q. Where are they located during the show? A. On this location, here, they were located in the back of the show, back at the dressing room.

Q. Tell me what you term as the back of the show. A. That's where the performers come in.

Q. That is at the extreme end, opposite the main entrance? A. That's right.

Q. How far away from that particular exit on that extreme end are they located? A. Well, on this location I'd say they were at least a hundred feet away or more.

Q. Do you know the approximate size of this location? A. The lot?



The Hartford fire in 1944.

Q. Yes. A. No, but I can tell you the size of the tent.

Q. I'd like that? A. 550 by 220, dimensions of your top from stake line to stake line, Length ways and across.

Q. 550 by 220? A. That's right.

Q. Have you much room beyond that territory for your equipment? A. Room to pass with the wagons.

Q. Room to pass with a wagon? A. Yes.

Q. As circus lots go, do you consider this a large one, or one with limited space? A. In circus language, it would be called "tight."

Q. It would be called tight. A. Yes sir.

Q. Do you have anything to do with the rental of these premises? A. No, we have an agent ahead of the show that rents the premises, rents the lot. His name would be on the contract in here, and it would be William J. Conway probably made this town. I'm pretty sure he did. He connects all the eastern territory.

Q. Are you familiar with the setup for training the employees for fire fighting purposes? A. We have a truck department with Mr. Blanchfield and his crew of truck drivers. The water truck drivers have always been instructed what to do, and where they're to be placed when that happens.

Q. Do they have fire drills? A. No.

Q. Has there ever been any type of training at all for fire fighting, instituted by the circus? A. Not other than explaining to the men just what they should do.

Q. Who explains it to them? A. The boss of the department, like Mr. Blanchfield instructs the truck drivers what they are there for, how they have their trucks full of water at all

times, and if they're not there, to be sure and notify him, so he'll have another man on the truck.

Q. Is there any course of training at all? A. I wouldn't say actual training; no, Commissioner.

Q. How many men are assigned to these trucks? A. There's two men to each truck.

Q. Two men to each truck? A. Driver and helper.

Q. The water trucks, so-called? A. That's right.

Q. Do you know of any training at all given to any of the employees in respect to fire fighting? A. Just other than the instructions that I have mentioned.

Q. Whose job is it to see that the buckets underneath the stands are filled with water? A. Leonard Aylesworth.

Q. Were you with the circus in 1941? A. 1941, yes sir.

Q. Were you in Cleveland? A. That was in 1942.

Q. Was there a fire there? A. There was, but I wasn't with the show.

Q. You weren't with the show? A. I was with the United States Government. I had the Army War Show all during that year; a leave of absence from this show.

Q. Are you acquainted with any treatment or application of any sort that was given this canvas top in Sarasota? A. Paraffine--it for waterproofing.

Q. Paraffined it for waterproofing? A. Yes sir.

Q. Tell me something about that process? A. It's wax and gasoline.

Q. Wax and gasoline? A. Boiled to a point of heat, and distributed by watering cans and brushing into the canvas.

Q. What is the purpose, to water proof? A. Water proof.

Q. Is there any process at all applied to the canvas for fireproofing? A. No.

Q. None what ever? A. No, as far as we could determine in trying to find that out there's nothing that would fireproof it and waterproof it at the same time, and this year it was impossible to buy what you'd call fireproof equipment.

Q. When was this top processed? A. In March--no, May.

Q. May of this year? A. That's right. The canvas didn't come out of the canvas loft until around the first week in May. We didn't have it finished.

Q. And that application is paraffin and gasoline? A. Gasoline boiled to a point of heat, distributed and brushed in. That serves to seal up all the pores in the canvas.

Q. Did I understand you to say that this year you were not able to get the materials for fireproof purposes? A. That's right.

Q. Was the canvas top for the previous years fireproof? A. No sir.

Q. How long since you have been fireproofing? A. We never fireproofed.

Q. What materials were you looking for? A. We were looking for material to fireproof the main tent.

Q. Tell me the materials? A. There's a house in Baltimore, the name of Hopper Manufacturing Company, they had got out some kind of a liquor that they claim will fireproof it, and we have letters from them and we have samples of their material, but we couldn't put it on the canvas, so it would remain fireproof. We could still burn it. I have letters on file where they offered to send somebody over to show us how to do it. When they came over, they sent us the samples back from the plant, and when it came back, it burned just the same.

Q. Where are those letters? A. In the file.

Q. Where is the file? A. On the show grounds.

Q. Now I understood that in 1943 you were not able to fireproof the top or the canvas? A. That's right.

Q. In 1942? A. That's right.

Q. 1941. A. That's right.

Q. How long since you had a fire proofing. A. Well, Commissioner, I have been around the show since 1910, and we never fireproofed the top.

Q. You never fireproofed the top? A. Never.

Q. Where did you get the idea that it was necessary to do it for this one? A. Because the young man that's taken charge of the show and was made the president a year ago, insisted on it by all possible means; he wanted to go as far as he could.

Q. Can you give me some idea as to the mixture of paraffin and gasoline

applied to this canvas top?

A. I think we paid for six thousand gallons of white gasoline; Barrels of wax run 300 pounds to the barrel; about sixty barrels of wax. That would be 180--1,800 pounds paraffin.

Q. Did you participate; in this application of this material? A. No, I was in New York with the show when that was done.

Q. Whose job was it to do this? A. Mr. Aylesworth.

Q. And he would be the man that superintended it? A. That's right.

Q. He would be the man that superintended this process? A. Yes sir.

Q. Are you familiar with the amount of public liability insurance coverage? A. Mr. Haley handles that. I am familiar with it. I think we carry up to \$500,000.00.

Q. Are you familiar with the amount of fire insurance coverage? A. I couldn't say the exact amount; no. That changed hands. The insurance changed hands when this new management came in, in 1942.

Q. And it is the present management whom you have described to me as the officers of this combine? A. That's right.

Q. I understood you to say that Mr. Haley handles all the liability insurance coverage? A. All the insurance is handled through the Vice President.

Q. Will you tell me where you were when the fire broke out today? A. I was just starting the show at 2:23, walked out through the connection, through the main entrance, out to what we call the ticket yellow wagon that sells the reserved seats, to see if the line had broke; walked back to the main entrance. Probably fifteen minutes must have elapsed, which was time enough for the animal act to be over, which takes twenty minutes, and as I got back to the main entrance the animals were coming out of the chute to go back to the wagon, a lot of people came out under the wall. Naturally the first thing I thought of was one of the animals got loose, so I started in the connection, which is the entrance into the big tent through the menagerie, and I didn't have to go any farther. The top was all aflame then, at what we call



The Hartford fire in 1944.

our connection, where they go in. That was in a mass of flames. The elephants were starting to roar and stampede, just about the time we were to take them out to the back of the tent to line up for the parade; so I ran over and gathered up the elephant men and took them out through the front, chased them down by the back there. By that time fire engines were arriving and we got the wagons out in order so they could come in that alley, and start the hose in there. It was a bad break; there wasn't room enough to get around with the trucks to the back end. They were all blocked off. We got the elephants out there and opened up that through, so we could get right down through there with the hose.

Q. Were any employees reported to you as injured? A. No there weren't.

Q. Or killed? A. No, sir. There's a few of the boys took treatment for burns and bruises back there.

Q. Were any of the animals injured? A. Not that I know of.

Q. Now, can you tell me these water trucks that you mentioned that were located about a hundred feet at the far end of the tent, are these trucks used mainly for wetting down the grounds? A. They're used for wetting down the grounds, watering the animals, carrying water to the water barrels for the working men, Watering the cook house.

Q. And the fire equipment, then, in that respect, as far as they are concerned, is just incidental? A. No, not incidental, because the trucks haven't anything to do while the performance is on. They do the wetting down before, and the watering of the animals is done before that.

Q. How much fire hose on each vehicle? A. I think they have one length on each one.

Q. What do you understand the length to be? A. Fifty foot.

Q. What size hose? A. Two and a half.

Q. What is the capacity of the water in each truck? A. Six thousand gallons.

Q. Are you familiar with the pressure? A. Well, as I explained, the pressure will throw a stream almost up over the big top.

Q. What is the height of the top? A. The top when it's standing in the air, the peak is forty-eight foot. The center poles are fifty-seven foot. Your block and your ring drop it down about nine feet.

Q. I'd like to know if the canvas that, was used for the side wall around the main tent was also processed with this paraffin? A. No; it's never waterproofed.

Q. That was not? It's only the top? A. That's all.

Q. That constitutes the main top? A. That's right.

Q. Those water trucks that you have, can you tell me what arrangement is made about keeping them filled? A. Every time they're empty, they go to the plug.

Q. In other words, the practice is to keep them supplied with water? A. That's right.

Q. And you are dependent solely on the nearest hydrant furnishing that water? A. We don't always get the nearest hydrant.

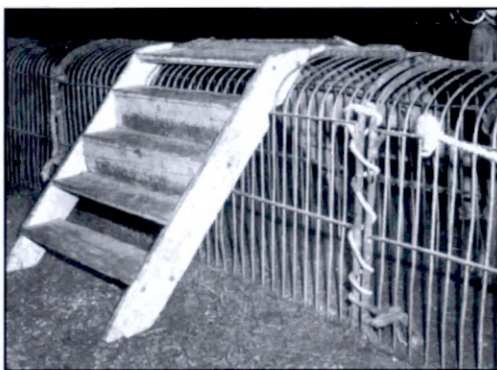
Q. You are dependent upon whatever supply is in the community? A. That's right.

Q. Right? A. That's right.

Q. There is no special water supply furnished or set up by the circus people from a hydrant anywhere to bring water in on the premises? A. Well, in some towns you would have a hydrant right on the lot, but in most times you go away a block or so.

Q. You are familiar with the setup here. There's no hydrant there? A. There's one right at the front of the lot, but you couldn't use it without getting the front of the lot all wet.

Q. So that the water that would be there for fire fighting purposes, would have to be carried there? A. Yes; that plug was there, and they hooked onto it.



The steps over the Court animal chute which Smith was questioned about.

Q. You are familiar with the setup as to the seating arrangements, that is, as to the number of seats, capacity? A. Yes sir.

Q. What was the capacity for this town? A. The capacity in grandstand chairs was 6,048. The tickets were sold for that many seats. We allow 3,000 general admission tickets on the blue seats.

Q. So you give it as 9,000? A. 9,000. If you get more than that in them, you have them sitting on the ground.

Q. 9,800 in that setup? A. 9,048.

Q. 9,048, I'm sorry. You are also familiar with the exhibition cages where the animals performed here today? A. The steel arenas?

Q. Yes. A. Yes, sir.

Q. As I understand it, you were inside the tent at 2:23? A. That's right.

Q. You left to go out? A. That's right.

Q. At the time that you left, were the animals on exhibition at that time? A. No, we start the show with a little girl number that comes on first, after we play the Star Spangled Banner. I was out before the animals got in there.

Q. You were out before the animals got in there? A. Yes.

Q. You are familiar, though, with the run cages that go from the exhibition cage on the left-hand side of the main show? A. Yes, sir.

Q. And will you tell me what you call this--I call it a parade ground, that runs around these three or four rings. That space that's east of the A. Between the two rings?

Q. No; between the grandstand and the exhibition? A. That's what we call our track.

Q. That's what I want to get. These run cages run over the track? A. That's right.

Q. And in emptying your grandstand for one purpose or another, the track is used as an exit? A. That's right.

Q. And to get to the exits, you must come from the seats into the track? A. That's right.

Q. And you must come from the track into the exits? A. If you use that exit.

Q. Yes, if you use that exit. Now, if you want to go to the exits that are at both ends of the tent, that is, the exits that are at the bandstand or the exits that constitute the main entrance, and you happen to be sitting on the left-hand side, you are required to climb over these run cages on that track? A. Well, that arrangement was made so those people sitting there would use both those center exits and, either track is open on the one side all the way down. The center ring is open. They can use one side exit or both sides.

Q. I understand. But if you are on the left-hand side, which is the north side in this place? A. That's right.

Q. And you came out of any one of the reserved seats on the north side, and you wanted to go to the exit at one of the exits at one end of the tent or the other end of the tent, you had to climb over this? A. You had to get up over the steps.

Q. I want to have you tell me, please, what is set up on these cages for patrons of the circus to get over them? A. Just a pair of steps set over each one.

Q. Those steps are taken down, are they not, when the animals are running there?

Q. When the animals are through, when they take the chute out, they're supposed to be taken down. A. Now there are also boards that are put in slots, put in through this run cage, to prevent the animals from backing up. That's to keep them from fighting, and to keep them from backing up.

Q. To keep them separated or keep them from backing up? A. That's right.

Q. Those are pulled out, and an attendant either holds them in his hand, or lays them down on the track? A. He pulls one out, and lets

an animal go by, and puts it back in.

Q. He removes this so-called stairway, also, when the animals go through, and he either holds that in his hand or lays it on the ground? A. Will you say that again, please?

Q. When the animal is passing through the run cage he takes up those stairs that act as a climber? A. He's not supposed to take the stairs down. The stairs are up, but when the arena is set up, they're not supposed to come down until the arena is taken down.

Q. Can you tell me the width of those stairs? A. About five foot.

Q. And there's just one cross-over on each one of these? A. That's right.

Q. Can you tell me the width of the track? A. From pole to pole?

Q. From the seating to the exhibition? A. Eighteen feet.

Q. Can you tell me the number of people that sit in the reserved sections? A. If they are sold out, it would be five times 288.

Q. Five times 288, on each side? A. On each side of your center exit.

Q. Can you tell me the number of people that sit in the bleachers that are located at both ends of the tent? A. One end you have eighteen lengths, which is the front end. The back end, where you have the band and two big exits, you have sixteen lengths. You take 100 people to the length. We figure three thousand for our capacity for thirty-two lengths, that would make it.

Q. Can you tell me how many steps are on this runway that go over this cage? A. Five.

Q. How long does that animal act last? I am thinking of the lions. A. Twenty minutes. It might vary a minute one way or the other.

Q. What time was it to go on? A. I started the show at 2:23, the Star Spangled Banner; a minute of assembly, two minutes, and the animals are on.

Q. And they run for twenty minutes? A. That's right.

Q. Do you know whether or not the animal act had been concluded when this fire broke out? A. It must have been concluded, because the animals were coming out when I noticed the people coming out I went in and the place was on fire.

Q. Can you tell me the name of the wax that is applied to this, that

is used in this mixture? The brand? A. It's the paraffin wax bought from the Standard Oil people. It's called their paraffin yellow wax.

Q. And you have the bills that show the purchase of this? A. Oh yes, they would be down in Sarasota. Our auditing department is in Sarasota.

The Commissioner: I think that's all that I want to inquire of tonight, Mr. Smith. I will want to make further inquiries of you as this investigation goes on.

Kennedy: I'd like that he would be held tonight for a short time in case we want to renew it?

The Commissioner: Yes. Will you please wait outside. May I say this to you, please, Mr. Smith, that while the inquiry is on, I would appreciate it if you would not discuss it with other employees. A. I haven't since I was called down here.

The Commissioner: Thank you. Legal adjutor for the circus, Herbert Duval, was called by the Hartford County Coroner, Frank Healy, to testify about the Hartford fire. His testimony follows from January 1945 follows:

Q. Are you a lawyer? A. No sir.

Q. You are an adjutor from long experience that has worked out a system that makes things easy, both for the circus and the people? A. I am a buffer between the people and the circus. I handle all kinds of complaints.

Q. You personally have nothing to do with the real running of the circus? A. I don't have anything to do with the mechanical end of it.

Q. Take the chutes that the animals were forced through, from the inside of the tent to the outside. Who would have charge of them? What

An Alfred Court steel arena with a fallen center pole after the fire.



man connected with the circus? A. I imagine the management, Mr. George W. Smith.

Q. Is Mr. Smith's word final in the management? A. Yes, generally.

Q. Would he be over Mr. Haley, for instance? A. His opinion or viewpoint would be over Mr. Haley and for this reason the strange thing about the circus is that nobody is the boss, but that everybody is the boss. Nobody comes and asks me how much I paid today or whether I had any difficulty, or why did I pay \$300 instead of \$200.

Q. In the circus proper then, from your point of view, in your experience with it, every man that has authority in the circus, has certain duties to perform? A. That's correct.

Q. For instance, if you know that a change is desired in the construction of the tent, or equipment, who is responsible for that to make these changes? A. In what respect?

Q. If a man wanted to change those chutes that led out from the tent? A. I believe that would be kind of a general responsibility of the company if they were going to change the act.

Q. Your General Manager, Mr. George W. Smith, if he comes to the conclusion that a change should be made in the chutes, in order to give more protection to the general public, and Mr. Haley, the Vice President of the company said no, those chutes are in my judgment, all right. Who would the final responsibility rest on that change, for instance? A. I will give you how I think it would come out by having associated with them. Mr. Smith would say, I want to change those chutes, and he would probably call in the animal man who owns the act. We don't own that property. We don't even own those animals. Alfred Court owns them.

Q. Where did Mr. Court come from? A. France. His address is Sarasota, He has imported all that act from France.

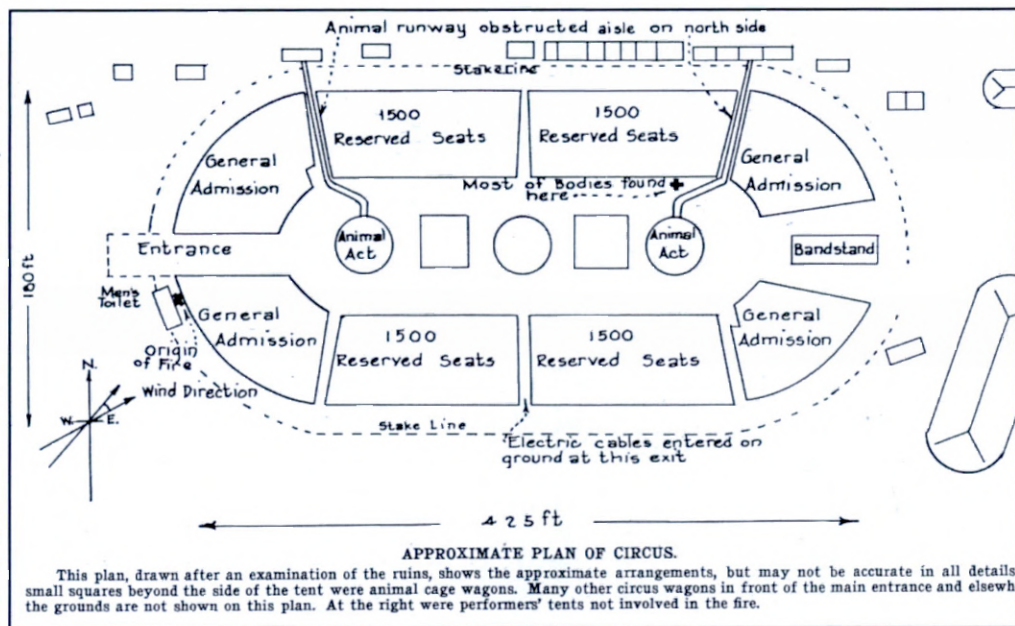
Q. Mr. Court owns the act, and rents it to the show at a weekly rate? A. Yes, Mr. Haley would not express an opinion about it, for the reason this is the second year he is around the circus. He is not a circus man. He has been a certified public accountant and real estate man, and kind of a politician down there. . . . I would just imagine that Mr. Smith would

say that chute has got to be changed. He would call in Mr. Pat Valdo, who has charge of all the performances. He is the, Personnel Director of Performances. They would probably confer about changing the chute. . . .

On Tuesday, July 11, 1944, Coroner Healy began his inquest into the fire, even hoping that one of the witnesses could assist in determining the fire's origin. There was a concern that claims against the circus for the fire might consume all of the show's financial reserves. As a result,

Edward Rogin and two other attorneys asked superior court justice, H. King, to put the circus in temporary receivership with Rogin as the receiver. Rogin and Smith also wanted to accelerate the show's departure from Hartford. Judge King offered the following plan in order to get things moving, here condensed by Joe Bradbury in a 1981 *White Tops* article: "Bonds and insurance totaling one million dollars were to be designated by the circus to pay any adjudicated claim in Connecticut and accepted by Ringling, the show would be permitted to move its equipment from Hartford. The show accepted and shortly thereafter the 79 railroad cars were quickly loaded and were en route to Sarasota. Details in a trade publication reported that in order to release the property and rolling stock, the Big Show arranged for a bond to be posted in the sum of 375 G's and in addition assigned to the received 125 G's expected to be collected from fire insurance companies and 500 G's under policies issued by Lloyds of London. . . . From the time of this fire until the departure date, July 15, the show's personnel lived in the regular sleeping cars with the exception of a few execs who moved over to the Bond Hotel.

"During this time the cookhouse remained in operation and fed three meals a day. Everything on the lot remained just as it was after the fire until the judge gave his release order.



Rogin, Smith and one or two other circus officials motored to the Barbour Street show grounds at Hartford and prepared an inventory of damaged and undamaged equipment. . . . All had to be loaded onto circus flats, and Smith was invaluable in this regard because of his experience. Judge King signed the order under which the circus was permitted to leave Hartford on Friday, July 15, 1944, nine days after the fire. The order technically released the physical assets of the circus into the custody of Edwin Rogin, who is also the one who reappointed Smith general manager of the circus. The undamaged wagons and vehicles and equipment were taken to the sprawling Windsor, Connecticut yards of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. It was Rogin's responsibility to see that everything owned by Ringling was loaded and returned to quarters at Sarasota."

The first section pulled out at 5:00 p.m., bypassing New York City. It carried working personnel, elephants, and cookhouse, and arrived at quarters on the following Tuesday, July 18; the second section carried the sleepers for performers and executive staff and arrived shortly thereafter, as did the third section with baggage wagon loaded with undamaged equipment.

The show had to be put back on the road to complete the 1944 tour in order to raise money to pay bills

A layout of the big top at the time of the fire.

resulting from the fire. Robert Ringling and James Haley departed for Florida followed by Smith, Aylesworth, Versteeg and Blanchfield, and they immediately set to work. Their trial had been postponed until August 16, 1944. Prior to their arrival in winter quarters management had already formulated plans for a quick return with performances in open air arenas instead of under canvas. Some personnel at winter quarters had to do unfamiliar tasks but in spite of this they worked like beavers rebuilding equipment that had been damaged and destroyed. This was a monumental task.

By the end of July, the circus was ready to emerge from winter quarters in spic and span condition with new equipment (equipment replaced after about 11 or 12 days of intensive and hectic work). It was decided to leave 12 flatcars at quarters which usually transported the big top, seat stakes and other paraphernalia, but the personnel usually in these areas were moved to other duties. Smith believed this would alleviate a critical shortage of manpower in some other departments.

As scheduled, the circus opened in Akron, Ohio's Rubber Bowl for a three-day stand, August 4-6, 1944. The first section left winter quarters at 9:00 a. m. on July 30 over the trackage of the Atlantic Coast Line,

Central of Georgia, Louisville & Nashville and Pennsylvania Railroad into Akron. The August 12th *Billboard* told the story with the headline, "R-B Bow In Bowl Historic. Ringlings opening under brilliant sky for Akronites. Precision and Smoothness Amaze 6,000 Who Sit Thru Rain to See New Set Up of the Big One Flameproof canvas in use for Sidewalks and Auxiliary Tops." This was an amazing tribute to the driving genius and industry of circus people and for their devotion to the traditional philosophy, "The Show Must Go On."

However, *The Circus Fire* author, Stewart O'Nan painted a gloomy picture of the first day in Akron. Ringling continued on to fairly good business in Detroit, Chicago, and Indianapolis.

In a closely related matter, before departing on the Blue Sky tour: "... testing of the fire proofing material was made with newsmen and show officials present. The test was conducted by L. L. Heffner, chief chemist for the William E. Hoope Company, Baltimore, Maryland."

General Manager Smith indicated that the test was highly successful. "We need not worry about future fires. The circus-going public can enjoy the show without a worry about danger." Smith also remarked that the show had tried to get this chemical a year or so earlier but was unsuccessful because of government priorities (for their own tents and related gear). The official explanation was: "Due to wartime shortages, the military had exclusive access to the only proven flame-retardant waterproofing solvent. It was argued other forms were available, and used by other performance companies, but the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus claimed the alternatives were not effective. Smith said the show obtained 1,2000 gallons of the flame-proofing liquid for the sideshow tent and that the compound looked like liquid chalk or thick milk and was applied with a paint brush. The treatment was supposed to last as long as the canvas. The chemical was applied to the side-walls of the sideshow tent, dressing and horse tents. The side show tent was the only one that the public was



The entrance to the Akron Rubber Bowl, first stand of the re-opened circus.

allowed to enter in 1946, as performances were generally held out-of-doors in open-air arenas or parks.

Coroner Frank E. Healy issued his report on the fire January 11, 1945, and he held the circus corporation (seven officials and employees of the circus) criminally responsible for the death of 168 adults and children and injuries to 682 others. The maximum penalty on a charge of involuntary man-slaughter was, at the time, 15 years in prison and a \$1,000 fine. His report was filed with the State Attorney, Hugh M. Alcorn, Jr., late in the day and with the Clerk of the Superior Court. Coroner Frank Healey included the following report on January 11, 1945: "The chief manager of the circus and in charge of equipment and operations in Hartford on July 6, was Mr. George W. Smith. He testified before me that he had made no inspection of the premises, that he was well aware of the absence of his subordinate and that he had taken no steps to replace the Supervisor or Boss Canvas man or the Foreman in charge of the stake or seatmen."

As a result of the coroner's report, Haley, Smith, Aylesworth, Versteeg, and Blanchfield were out on bail awaiting trial. All were charged with neglect of duty. Smith knew he was supposed to adhere to a standard routine. There is no mention of his lack of responsibility because of his addiction, and there is no evidence that he was drunk when the fire occurred. Although Smith didn't

directly cause the fire, it is possible that if all the routine orders had been followed, the loss of life and injuries might have been far less. Smith believed that he had been fairly dealt with in the court. He said that he was justly convicted and was willing to abide by the court's decision.

Smith indicated in testimony that it was Robert Ringling who suggested the circus look into the matter of fire-proofing the canvases. The coroner learned that "Aylesworth went to Springfield, Massachusetts,

the morning of the fire to lay out the grounds and start the stake work for the appearance of the circus there after leaving Hartford . . . although Aylesworth didn't return until after the fire. His assistant was also away on account of a death of a relative. Aylesworth reported to Smith that he was going to Springfield but neither man appointed a supervisor of fire extinguishers during his absence." The coroner concluded that "Haley traveled with the circus and must necessarily have had personal knowledge of conditions that appear in the evidence on the case, that Smith, as general manager, also knew of these conditions."

Blanchfield placed wagons and trucks around the big top set in such a way as to imperil patrons and workmen seeking exits in order to escape the flames. Carley and Clark were charged because they were not at their posts when it was their duty to watch for possible fires. Small fires had occurred because of the callous throwing of cigarette butts and cigar stubs on to the surface of the ground under the seats where paper and trash and sawdust accumulated. Healey and Police Commissioner and State Fire Commissioner, Edward Hickey, concluded the fire was caused by an individual or individuals throwing a lighted cigarette on to the canvas of the big top's sidewall between that tent and the adjacent one, near the men's toilet areas. The circus men were arrested after the first hearing on the fire by Commissioner Hickey.

Earlier in the afternoon on the Barbour Street circus lot and before the fire, Smith and Ringmaster, Fred

Bradna "... were confronted with a threat of stormy weather so they decided to cancel three of the opening displays and open with the spectacle but this action didn't seem to bother the audience."

It was held that the seven were "guilty of such wanton or reckless conduct, either of commission, or of omission, where there is a duty to act which makes them criminally liable for the deaths. . . . State Police Commissioner, Edward J. Hickey, also as State Fire Marshall, filed with the State's Attorney the report of his investigation into the fire but its contents were withheld by Mr. Alcorn pending a study of it." Those charged were James A. Haley, George W. Smith, Leonard Aylesworth, Edward R. Versteeg, David W. Blanchfield, William Caley and Samuel Clark.

Commissioner Hickey, as stated, issued a lengthy report in which he accused each of the men of contributing to the fire. He concluded that Blanchfield's drivers were poorly trained and unprepared for the fire. Versteeg was responsible for the distribution of fire extinguishers and this wasn't always done if orders didn't come down from Smith's office on the circus lot. Versteeg "utterly failed in his duty to distribute and place fire extinguishers around the big top." Aylesworth apparently saw that the extinguishers weren't in place but didn't report it or do anything about it.

Attorney Alcorn, Jr., the State's Attorney, laid heavy blame on the corporation itself for several acts of commission and omission. He pointed out that only two months earlier the big tent had been waterproofed with a mixture of 6,000 gallons of gasoline and 130 barrels of paraffin. Failure to have sufficient fire-fighting equipment; neglecting to distribute what fire equipment there was around the big circus tent; failure to take warning of the danger of fire from the fact that in the two months it had been on the road, the circus experienced several small fires including one at Providence, Rhode Island on July 4th and at Portland, Maine July 1st; per-

mitting men charged with guarding the public to be absent from their posts; and sending the circus on the road with a working force of only 550 men, compared to the usual 1,000 employees.

Alcorn also charged that Smith was responsible, specifically for the purchase of equipment and therefore was responsible for the lack of sufficient fire fighting equipment; the use of what the circus had was not standard and nozzles could not be attached to city hydrants and their failure led to many fire deaths. There was no evidence that the City of Hartford ever held a fire drill in its entire history. All charges that George W. Smith and the others faced were never dreamed of when they accepted their positions with the circus. However it should have crossed Smith's mind, as well as his colleagues, that there was always the possibility of fire when using gasoline and paraffin for waterproofing, and small fires had already occurred.

To temper Alcorn's remarks, the defense counsel, William. Hadden, pointed out to the court that neither he nor his clients believed they were guilty of any culpable or criminal negligence. He said it had been decided early on not to contest the State's charges because of factors concerned with the circus's avowed purpose to aid the fire victims. Hadden further pointed out that the circus had joined in receivership action which enabled it to resume operation and had proposed an arbitration argument under which claims already settled would

The big show under the sky in Chicago's Soldier Field.



be honored in death cases. Further he announced: "We're going to dedicate every resource of the circus to the victims of the fire. This is why we must try this case." Alcorn also commended the action of other circus employees

Alcorn also commended the actions of other circus employees: Jack Sabo, menagerie superintendent, and Joseph Costa, menagerie assistant; Vincent Corr, assistant superintendent; Alfred Court's wild animal department; Fred Schafer, superintendent, and his assistants--Vernon Duffy, Robert Clark and Richard Shipley of the elephant department; and Harrison Johnson, superintendent and his assistants Frank Selock and Roland Simpson of the ring stock department; plus men of the usher department. These men had quickly removed the wild animals; which perhaps helped circus patrons keep their panic level down. All employees were commended for working so diligently to give aid to victims as fire consumed the big top.

The trial got underway on February 16, 1945, before Superior Court Judge, William Shea, a gregarious New England Irishman. Defendants who entered pleas were Haley, Smith, Aylesworth, Blanchfield, Versteeg, Caley, and Clark, all of whom were advised to do so by their lawyers because they faced counts of involuntary manslaughter charges.

The circus men plead nolo contendere which meant they would accept conviction but not admit guilt. Their fate was left to the mercy of the court. As indicated the defense team headed by ex-Lt. Governor, William L. Hadden, entered the plea, not because it would be an admission of guilt, but was offered to avoid a long and involved trial which would keep the defendants from their posts, and thus prevent the circus from continuing to tour. It would also assist the circus in paying claims to the many fire victims. He argued that it was still early in the tenting season, and money could be available to pay off claims.

More Ramblings From *Red Sannerberg*

PART THREE

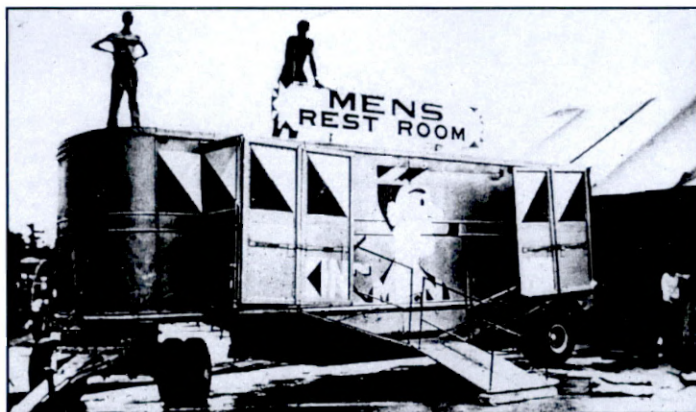
When Art Concello decided to modernize the donikers (toilets) on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, he bought two large semi-trailers and put in modern facilities. We played Montreal, Quebec, that first year with the new donikers. As you know most people in French Canada do not speak or read English. I had my program box along side of the lady's doniker, and during the come-in, everybody who went by, both men and women would go into it, thinking that it was a walk-through show of some kind like on carnies.

I was wasting all my time telling them what it was, but it was a losing cause, so I just let them go in. The men would come out laughing and many a lady was caught with her strides down those days in Montreal.

I always claimed to be a keen observer and see things that went on around me. I used to make a study of people coming into the circus and of all the thousands I saw I can honestly say I have never knowingly saw a Greek at a circus. For several years I looked for one and never did I see one that I thought was a Greek.

Another observation--beware of a

The men's rest room on Ringling-Barnum. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise credited.



man smoking a pipe and a lady wearing a mink coat, give them plenty of air.

Johnny McNulty a connection man and ticket seller on various rowdy-dowdy shows, had a real tough winter around 1924. He came in the City Hotel in Chicago where all the show hands hung their hats and went for the Jack-Pots. He had on a straw hat he had painted black with a show dauber. In the dead of winter he had on an ice cream suit and suede button shoes. I asked Johnny how things were. He answered the chilly winds had really gotten to him and that he was heading for New Orleans and the Mardi Gras. That way he could find a climate to suit his clothes.

Arky Woods had an outside stand and was buyer for George Davis who had the candy stands on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Among Arky's duties was to go to town every day and order the Coke, ice cream and ice for every department on the show. As there were so many places ice had to be delivered he would ride in the ice wagon to show where the ice went.



The entrance to the Sarasota winter quarters of Ringling-Barnum.

In a town in Indiana Arky, riding the wagon like he did, went to the railroad yards to make a delivery to the privilege car. It happened that the car was spotted where they

could not get close and the only way to deliver it was for the iceman to hump it to get it there. The iceman put up a beef and said he was not going to carry that ice over all those tracks. Arky said, "The hell your not," and pulled out his Roscoe and went bam-bam at the feet with his big pistol. That was the fastest delivery they had all season.

After Dick Scatterday, Arky and myself closed with the Gentry show, Arky invited us to his home in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Arky had one of the greatest vocabularies of cuss words that I ever heard, including some I had never heard before.

The morning after our arrival we met a preacher who Arky knew. After he introduced the preacher, Arky never said a word. After leaving the preacher I said to Arky, "How come you never said anything after introducing us to the preacher." Arky replied, "Never smarten up a sucker."

The last season the Ringling show was out under canvas we had union people picketing around Madison Square Garden. I had a load of 75,000 programs coming to the Garden and I had to figure out a way to overcome the teamsters if the truck driver refused to cross the picket line.

So before the truck arrived I approached the pickets and asked them if they wanted to make a fast five bucks each. I told them about the programs coming and that it would take them less than an hour as I had other men helping also. They said ok. So when the truck came there were no pickets and everything went fine. After helping unload the programs the pickets went back to picketing. So no doubt the moral of this is: If you can't beat them make them join you.

I had charge of the tickets on the front gate of the Sarasota winter quarters of the Big Show. As we were closing the gates one day, two young gunsels came up to me asking about getting a job with the show.

They looked like they had a bad case of missing meals cramps; they looked real gaunt, so I asked them if they were hungry? One said they hadn't eaten in three days, so I thought the best place for them was the cookhouse. Boys, I told them just follow that road until you see a big white building, I believe they can use you. They thanked me and went in.

The next day I made the cookhouse for lunch and there were our heros. One was a waiter and the other was dishing out the soup to the hands.

About a week later as we were closing the gates, again here came our heros. They had their little bags with them. I said, "Boys you are not leaving the Greatest Show on Earth." Here is the answer I got, "Screw the cookhouse, Ringling Bros. and screw you too." Of course after a week in the cookhouse they had got the wrinkles out of their bellies. They were looking for new worlds to conquer.

In 1929 when Cole Bros. World Toured Circus was breathing its last, we finally stumbled into Breharn, Texas. Business had been very bad and the weather worse. It was raining like hell as I awoke. I got out of my berth and stuck my kisser out into the vestibule and I hollered at Jimmie James, the boss-hostler, "How does it look?" "Well," said Jimmie, "the lot is under water and the wagons are strung all over town, and it sure looks like this is it." So I gathered all my worldly possessions and checked into a hotel, figuring we had breathed our last.

A newspaper ad for the Buck Jones Wild West show.

Late that evening I ran into Horace Laird, the producing clown, and a bunch of clowns. I asked Horace where he was going. Horace said, "Red, don't say that you think the show is closing as you will have the clowns thinking it is." But then Horace was always an optimist.

A few days previous to this Floyd King came up to me and said, "Red, I can't meet the payroll tonight. You know I have to give the kinkers, clowns and musicians something, and I know you won't beef." I said, "Floyd, don't worry about Red; he always pays himself every day."

That was the season I was with two losers, Buck Jones Wild West and now Cole Bros. While I was with the Buck Jones wild west show, leaving the lot in Frisco, I was riding with

the stage coach to the train. We passed a ginmill and one of the candy butchers called Little Mac came out. He was really loaded. He had on a full load of gilly water and felt as brave as anyone in his condition usually does.

He jumped in the coach and started popping off what he was going to do to Buck Jones, as the show had not been paying off as business had been very bad since we opened.

I started ribbing Mac, saying that he was not really going to do this to Buck. When we came to the train we passed Buck's private car. I started ribbing Mac again. He jumped and climbed up into Buck's car. But a very few seconds later Mac came flying out again and he had the nicest looking shiner I ever did see. I don't know who belted Mac, but whoever did it did a very good job.

Another tidbit about the Jones show. We had tough going from the opening day. The show was not paying off and every day there were plenty of attachments against the show.

I told Ernie Baldwin, one of the outside stand men, that it looked like we were breathing our last. So in Provo, Utah we got together to see where we could get some get-a-way money.

The show's sleeping cars had plenty of blankets. One of the vestibules was full of them. So Ernie and I clouted all of the blankets and we peddled them to a gang of Mexican gandy-dancers working on the D. and R. G. railroad. I knew about getting paid off in the dark and under the bridge, but this was the first time I believe anybody ever got paid off in blankets on a circus.

Trouping in the hills of Kentucky was always exciting. It always separated the men from the boys. I was sitting in the pie car with the Gentry show in Harlen, Kentucky one night talking with Mrs. Jess Adkins, the manager's wife, and "Yellow" Burnett who worked in the connection, when a show hand came in and said, "There's a townner outside with a big pistol who says he is going to kill a showman." Up jumped Yellow and pulled out his own big roscow and went out and dough-popped the sucker with his pistol.

And that was the end of that. Of

course Yellow had a few belts of moonshine snootboot in him which gave him a little false courage.

They say everything exaggerated is unimportant. Well, a circus surely exaggerates and it may be unimportant, but it sure is a lot of fun.

One of the best kept secrets of circus history was in 1947 when John Ringling North regained control of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The deal had been brewing for some time whereby Mrs. Charles Ringling and her son Robert threw their support to North. I had been told by Art Concello about the deal in early in 1947, but was informed not to tell anyone of it.

When the deal finally happened, Concello and I left Bloomington, Illinois for Atlanta, Georgia where the show was playing, October 27 and 28, a Monday and Tuesday. We arrived in Atlanta on Sunday being a Sunday off we met a lot of the show people and a lot of them avoided Concello as he was one of the outs at the moment. But if they only knew what was going to happen in a few hours, they would of welcomed him with open arms.

Concello, and incidentally myself, had been on the outs on "Big Bertha" since 1943 when North lost control of the show to the combination of James and Aubrey Haley, and Mrs. Charles Ringling and Robert Ringling.

Concello had been general manager and when the combination gained control they made George W. Smith manager. Concello then bought the Russell Bros. Circus in June 1943 and operated it very profitably until the end of 1946, when he sold it to Clyde Beatty.

John North and his attorney Leonard Biscoe arrived in Atlanta on Tuesday, coming by train, after conferring with Concello. We drove to the lot to meet Jim Haley who was president and general manager.

While North, Concello and Biscoe were giving Haley the ultimatum that North had secured 51% control of the circus.

Being a minor member of the drama, I went over and talked to Harold Nickelson, Haley's chauffeur. After shaking hands

with him Harold said, "Red, the way it looks to me Old Silent Jim is good for about five more years in the saddle." If he had only known Silent Jim was being unsaddled at that very moment.

Another funny thing happened Monday night. Concello and I went out to the lot and the show was having a turnaway. As Concello and I were standing in front of the marquee a show hand who we had noticed was side walling, came up to us and asked if we wanted to see the show. Concello asked how much, the fellow said \$2.00. (General admission was \$1.50) Concello said at least the fellow asked enough. Well, two days later that fellow was unemployed.

When Concello took charge in Chattanooga, the town after Atlanta, all of those who had avoided him in Atlanta got right on the bandwagon.

The way things were going that season it would have closed long before it did in Pittsburgh in 1956, as the show would have been out of stuff with all the clouting going on.

One night I was talking to Concello in the big top while the show was going on. An usher came up to us and asked if we wanted a center seat. That was one of the few times I ever saw Concello really mad. He sure raised hell with Pete Grace, the head usher, when one of his ushers tried to hustle the general manager.

With Floyd King's Walter L. Main show, which was a rootin' tootin' grifter, we made the later Ben Davenport Dailey Bros. Circus look like a Sunday School show. Of course we had the cream of the crop of Lucky Boys who knew how to operate

The Walter L. Main Circus ticket wagon in 1927.



with a minimum of heat.

One day, Floyd, while sitting in my joint, was discussing the circus business in general. It was fall and we were down yonder playing the smaller towns trying to keep away from Charlie Sparks' circus and the American Circus Corporation shows as well as the Big Bad Wolf of them all, "Big Bertha" which would bill for miles and send a brigade in and cover all your paper.

I said to Floyd, "What this show needs is the Folksy Touch. The people in the small towns in the south would go for that." So here is what Floyd came up with in his newspaper ads, "Folks here is what Mr. Main would like you to think about when coming to my show, like when Grandma would invite the children back to the farm for Thanksgiving dinner, the More The Merrier." Of course the Folksy Touch did not go beyond that as we always had plenty of cat down yonder.

While on the subject of grift shows, I never was with a grift show that did not have a very good performance. Today these so-called Sunday School shows do not have grift and they don't have anything else either. So who is the winner in the contest?

Suppose you wanted to operate a grift show, here is all you would have to worry about. First you would have to get the right kind of talent to operate and know the score so the winnings would not get away from you; have plenty of fresh in the B. R. in case you ran into bad business after opening to keep the show going until the sun started shining on both sides of the fence again. Then all you would have to contend with would be cold, rain, mud, storms, even snow at times, blow downs, wrecks, dusty lots, poor train moves, late arrivals, late parades, exorbitant licenses and lot rents, hyping local merchants, shakedown officials, everyone wanting passes, shortages of help, strikes, and everybody trying to take their best shot at you with a Sunday punch. You would also have to make sure the general agent wasn't getting a kick-back from the paper company and that the cook



The 30 car Al G. Barnes Circus train in 1924.

house steward wasn't getting a kick-back when buying supplies. You would have to make sure the general agent was not on the payroll of the opposition. Then when you ran into bad business all you had to contend with was meeting the payroll.

Wouldn't that just be a lot of fun? The very foundation of a grift show is beefs, so if you can't stand a little heat and beefs you would never make it.

Here is another pitfall that used to plague circuses. What ever happened to the hoof and mouth disease? Many a show was tied up or had to change its route to get away from it. In 1924 the Al G. Barnes circus ran into it in California shortly after opening, so the show had to either close or lose a lot of days. Rather than close, the show jumped from Los Angeles, California to Galesburg, Illinois, a run of 2045 miles. Even for those days of lower rail moves it put quite a dent in the B. R.

In Mississippi in 1926 the Walter L. Main Show got orders it would have to dip all live stock. As Charlie Sparks Circus was playing the same vicinity, arrangements were made for both shows to dip at the same place on a Sunday at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, which also gave the folks a good chance to do a little visiting.

Playing the wheel one night in the late fall in the pie car of the Gentry show, a candy butcher won over a thousand dollars and quit while ahead. He noticed a couple of tough looking hands giving him the eyeball. So he was going to hit the kip, but instead he went out on the vestibule and jumped off

of the train. He wasn't going to take a chance with that walkaround in his kick and the chilly winds about to close in on him.

Bob Hickey, press agent with the John Robinson Circus, while playing Jacksonville, Florida went to the newspaper office and they demanded a large number of passes, which Bob said he could not give them. So the man said, "Just wait until you read our review of the show."

Here is how the review started, "John Robinson Circus is on their 107th annual tour and last night they played Jacksonville and it looked it."

Here's an Arthur Hoffman story. Arthur was invited to a Rotary Club luncheon. For an opener he said this, "I, a circus showman, and you all are legitimate business people. I don't know why I was invited here unless it was because I am connected with the largest gas company in the world-a side show orator."

The W. P. A. Circus big show band playing a center ring concert.



After opening in the Garden a New York newspaper man asked John Ringling North which of his many circus performers was his best. "The next one," answered JRN, always the perfectionist

A few years while visiting a small ragbag, and it was a real ragbag, the owner said to me, "I have an offer to

sell the show." After looking over his pile of junk I cracked, "If I were you I wouldn't refuse any offers."

Now that they have a Circus Hall of Fame I would nominate and elect without a dissenting voice, "All of those who joined a circus and came back for the second season."

I found that joining a circus was like the love-sick fella who said while proposing. "I may not give you any contentment, but you will never be bored."

The world's largest circus band was not with "Big Bertha." It was on the federal government-sponsored WPA Circus during the depression in the thirties. Professor William Cutty was the bandleader with 53 wind-jammers.

Billy Richie, an old time tramp cyclist, was also with the WPA Circus. He was paid \$23.85 a week after making as much as \$1,000 a day. Billy's specialty was the tramp bike act, in which he would take falls that made the audience think he was gonna break his neck. Billy was telling about the time he was work-

ing the Empire Theater in London and they cancelled him because they said, "You can't ride a bike, you keep falling off." The manager would not listen to Billy's explanation that it was part of the act and that he was suppose to fall off. So he went across the street where he got a booking at the Palace, where he stayed for nine months.

Some of the extra curricular activities in the off season were rather funny and a lot of fun when I was a young fella. In Louisiana one winter I was associated with an old character who called himself Dr. Gerard. He was a medicine pitch man who said when he was young he studied to be a croaker; of course he wasn't a licensed doctor. Being a good showman he dressed the part; he had real white hair, was always neatly dressed, wore one of those little string ties and one of those small little round skimmers. The only people I ever saw wearing one was a faker of some kind and Doc. was a real faker.

He was very good natured and very generous and was the softest touch I ever knew to anyone down on his luck. He neither smoked or drank. I use to tell him he looked more like an undertaker than a croaker.

We would come into a small town and either fix for a spot on the street or get a vacant lot downtown. We never paid for a spot to set up our trap. We always paid off in medicine which the natives seemed to relish getting. Doc didn't need any jig entertainers to hold his tip as he could tell more funny stories than anyone I ever knew.

We pitched corn and bunion remover and we would remove a few corns from our audience. We also sold tape worm eradicator, as Doc called it, and that good old standby of med shows, blood tonic, which he called Dr. Gerard's Elixir of Life.

After we finished with the med pitch, he would say he was going from the serious to the ridiculous and we would make a candy pitch. Doc would have his tip laughing all the time, so we just laughed them out of their dough. We never gave away many Mickey Mouse wrist watches but we sure loaded them up with Mother Murray's Famous Confection.

At the conclusion of the night's

activities, he would say as we liked their fair little city that we would spend a few days in their mist.

As he wasn't a licensed croaker that was his subtle way of hinting to people to call on him for advice. It was surprising the people that did call on him, especially women and their main lament was that the old man had lost his manhood.

He would prescribe for that by giving them a laxative. And then he would always say to me, "a good physic never hurt anyone." But he never used the word physic. He always used the word that began with an "s."

I tried to talk him into organizing a big medicine show, but he said he was too old and didn't want to make a lot of money. He also said that the days of the med shows were numbered.

He never talked about any people he had met and I never pressed him. Doc and I were a natural as he loved to talk circus, although he had never been with one.

The next season I got him on Lee Bros. Circus, where he took tickets on the front door and helped Col. Sam Dawson on press and on big days he would be a booster on the joints in the side show. Toward the end of the season he told me that year had been one of the happiest of his life. He would of made a great circus man.

The following winter I read in *Billboard* that he died in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He must have been in his eighties.

I think the following would describe the good Doc. He always had his eyes on all his company; he was tender toward the bashful; gentle toward the distant; merciful toward the absurd; he could relate to whom he was speaking; he guarded against unreasonable allusions that would

irritate; and was never wearisome. He knew the weakness of human nature as well as its strengths and limits.

The Velvet Ass Kid from old Vermont was one of those characters who reminded me of the contracts that show people used to sign that included the phrase "generally useful." He was what was called a utility man around grift shows.

The Kid was an artist in tossing the broads in the deuce notch joints. He could also lay a note and was very good at healing restaurants and hotels. He knew how to work a shive, how to work the envelope, could drop the pigeon and was an excellent booster handler as he looked like a real yap himself. He could work either paper or silver in the connection; knew how to high seat them. The Kid could do Dutch, blackface, vent and play the musical saw. When I. Buryen, the layout superintendent, went haywire by going to the pump once to often he could still lay out the lot. He could spot a poke on a hayseed a mile away to tip off the Whiz Mob working the march or the midway. On our Sundays off he could cook a wonderful Mulligan stew.

He worked the jam-pitch on the



I Made Myself So Useful That They Gave Me an Interest in One of the Shell Games

blow off and he gave away more Mickey Mouse wrist watches than any man either living or dead making the candy pitch on Mother Murray's Famous Confection. In the winter he wrote sheet for Cappers Weekly. He went to Hot Springs to take the baths and do a little touting at the track. The Kid was a wonderful kid worker and punk pusher, as he kept the kids laughing and scratching all the time.

If it wasn't for his extra curricular activities he would of been snatched up years ago by "Big Bertha."

The Kid is now resting on his laurels, retired on his farm in Illinois. He said he was strictly a railroad circus bum, but remembers the old time wagon mud shows with a little twang in his heart. But he couldn't stand those gas buggy circuses.

The Kid was quite a philosopher. I asked him one time if he had ever clouted anything. "None," he said, "I never stole anything, the Good Lord just gave me things that I plum forgot to ask permission to take."

After Christy Bros. Circus played some town, the next day the local paper had this to say about the show, "Christy Bros. Circus was in town yesterday, it was a good educational institution-it teaches you not to gamble."

Al Butler was sent to Norfolk, Nebraska to contract the town. Al thought he could put a feather in his hat by getting the show in for nothing. He went to the Chamber of Commerce and told them of all the business the show would bring into town on show day. The Chamber agreed to get a lot for nothing and pay the show a bonus. Well come show day and "Big Bertha" had one of their biggest days. When the man from the Chamber came around to pay-off, Charlie Ringling said, "Put it in your charity fund. Ringling Bros.



A Lee Bros. Circus bill stand in 1925.

doesn't have to pass the hat to play a town." The success of the Ringlings was so great that they made so much money they couldn't spend it all.

When Meyer Schlom, contracting agent for Lee Bros. Circus, went into the city clerk's office of a west Texas town to get a circus license to exhibit there, he found they had a very exorbitant fee. The clerk said that the movie people had an ordinance passed to keep out competition.

The clerk was a lover of the circus, so Meyer suggested that he issue him a license for a Chautauqua, which was only \$10.00. The clerk agreed.

Those of you who remember the old time Chautauqua that would come into town with a little tent and have as entertainment a lecturer who gave a program on "the live and habits of the English Sparrow." Some Jane, in a high contralto voice, would give a concert by singing The Indian Love Call and the not-to-be-forgotten harpist would give a soul searching rendition of Chopin's Lost Sympathy.

Then to put in a little spice in the cake they may have had a magician.

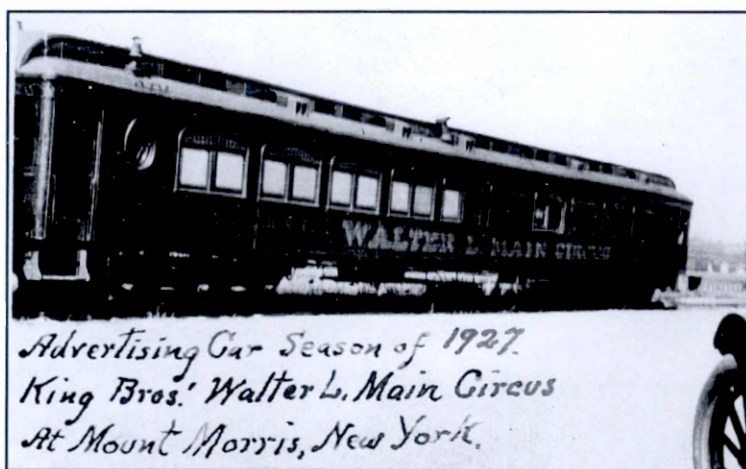
When I was a boy and the Chautauqua came to town. It was a dull week, as they usually stayed a week. No parade, no clowns, no wild animals, no fun and no nuttin. Of course it was exciting to the social climbers who always gave tea to the artists.

Well, when Lee Bros. finally came to this Texas town and the daily paper gave us a write-up. It was headed, "Will a grape fruit under any other name still squirt in your eye." It then went on to describe the Chautauqua that was showing there that day, saying the only lecturer was the man in front of the side show. The only music was a big and loud brass band. The only singing was by a lady called a Prima Donna in the spec. The only magic performed was a clever man in the side show with two shells and one pea. But he said he enjoyed the Chautauqua very much and hoped more Chautauquas like this one would come back more often. Then he said he had a P. S. It was the first Chautauqua he had attended that had a wild animal act. We had Capt. Terrell Jacobs' wild animal act.

I have lived through blow-downs, fires, wrecks, bad times and good times, clemis or hey rubes, but the worst days around a circus I ever experienced were with the Big Show and the Walter L. Main Circus.

So as the opposition used to say, "After the minnow comes the whale." Let's be polite and start with the minnow of the two, Walter L. Main.

We were playing Hazard, Kentucky, early in April in 1927. The day started all right. It was cold, but the sun was shining. We got in the matinee ok, but shortly after it started to rain, a cold chilling rain.



We started the night show. While the performance was going on the rain turned to snow and then sleet. So we gave them a John Robinson. As the snow and ice were clinging to the canvas, the weight of the snow started forming pockets in the big top. We got the menagerie down after a struggle, but we were all night and until two in the afternoon of the next day getting the big top down and everything loaded. Many of the quarter poles broke from the weight of the snow before getting the top down.

That was a night to remember by all of the working men, grifters, candy butchers, ticket sellers and even the actors. Everyone was with it and for it.

Now let's go on to Big Bertha. When it played Chattanooga, the day started with everything nice. After the matinee, I had gone downtown with two friends from Bloomington, Illinois. Sam Stern, a furniture dealer, and Ed Raycraft, who had the Cadillac dealership.

We did not show the Call Park lot that year; we showed a railway lot not too far from town. As we started back to the lot it started to rain. I said I better go to the cars and change my clothes, as I had on a new gray suit. Sam said, "Red this is just a sprinkle to settle the dust." And what a sprinkle it turned out to be. It really settled the dust.

We started the night show. By then, it had turned cold and was really raining. So we gave them another John Robinson. By the time the people were out everything was a very muddy mess, with cold rain in torrents and the wind blowing like hell.

That night to really separated the men from the boys. Art Concello and I fell in a deep hole up to our necks in mud. My scissorbill friends Sam and Ed took it on the Arthur Duffy quite early.

The show finally got off the next morning and even made the night show at Knoxville the next day. That was another night to remember by everybody on the show.

Cap Curtis, boss canvas man, told me in all his experiences that this was the worst he had ever seen.

And then there was the time the Ringling and John Robinson Circus

were having opposition down yonder.

The Ringling bill car got in first. A couple of black kids watched as the billers put up paper for the Greatest Show on Earth. Said one of kids, "I'm goin' to see Ringling Bros. because it is the biggest circus in the world."

About that time the Robinson show billers arrived and started covering Big Bertha's paper. The Robinson biller put his paper below where Ringling said Greatest Show on Earth and the date September 1. The second kid now cracked "I'm going to see John Robinson, because it is the biggest, because the paper said Ringling was the biggest Sept. 1 John Robinson."

Riding the show gilly bus on Ringling-Barnum from the lot to the show train one cold night late in November down south in the Carolinas, I overheard this conversation between a prop hand called Blackie and a young gunsel called Sidewall Red. Blackie was saying how lucky he was in having a good job and a good boss to work for, all the food he wanted to eat and a place to sleep. Nothing wonderful about this so far, but Blackie was a cripple who had polio when he was a youth. He walked with a shuffle and dragged his feet and working on props was one of the toughest jobs on any circus. The moral of this is "count your blessings, there are many of them."

Years ago Ollie Polk ran a spindle wheel in the side show. Every once in

Waldo Tupper, general agent of the Greatest Show on Earth.



a while down yonder someone would pull a Roscoe on Ollie and say he was going to shoot him.

Now Ollie was a Mississippi Cat himself, coming from a little wagon rut in the road called Soso. Ollie would just smile at him and con him around and finally beat him for the pistol also. Ollie died a natural death in bed.

Joe Tosey, the old Scissorbill and bug man on the big one, used to say. "The only difference between marriage and a good circus is two rings."

Lum Clark, of the M. L. Clark circus family, had a red monkey in a truck that he would trail the shows down yonder and set up downtown on show day.

While making his jumps from town to town, Lum would park the truck near a country store where there would always be some fellows sitting around. He would walk up to them and say, "Hey fellows you see that truck over there. I was over there and some widow woman has got the biggest gorilla I ever did see and I believe if we all put a little something in this old hat of mine she will let us look at the gorilla. Lum. would drop a quarter in the hat and the others would come up with a little. Well Lum picked up many a buck that way.

One season Lurn had his monk on the Gentry Dog and Pony Show. He would have the town gunsels help put up his pit show. When he gave them a ticket to the big show he would say to the kids, which one of you boys has a cherry tree with cherries on it? To the one that had cherries he would say you know the old gorilla likes cherries, so you bring some when you come back. To another he said bring bread, as the old gorilla liked bread. Well, old Lum didn't have to buy many groceries.

Walter L. Main used to tell us that he could not stand to see his patrons not properly seated and that was on big days he would go into the big top and help high seat 'em. But, while he was doing that the help out front would be robbing him.

One season on Big Bertha some laxative company had men giving away samples in front of the midway. The laxative was a fig concoction and

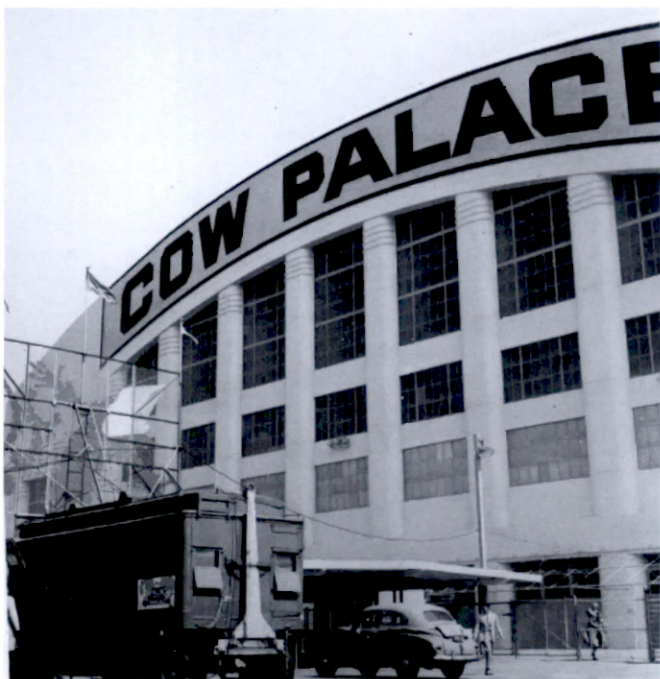
tasted like candy. Well, for several days the donikers sure did a rush business.

In a town in Louisiana we had a sponsor for the minstrel show with the Star Green Amusement Company. The chairman of the sponsor was a little runt of a fellow who ran a little greasy spoon restaurant. I told him we would give them 40% of the tickets they sold. He said, "in other words we get 25 cents on every dollar." I said yes sir and signed him for 25%. This little story proves you do not have to have wind to have a blow down around a circus.

Frank Gentry had a small tent where he would take a nap in every day. The fellow who put up the top was sort of a valet to Frank. He was called Friday.

Frank had a big car. One day in putting up the top Friday, instead of

The Ringling-Barnum red ticket wagon in front of the Cow Palace. Ted Sato photo from the Mac-Dougall collection.



Frank McClosky, Willis Lawson and Art Concello planning a route. Ted Sato photo in the MacDougall collection.

driving in stakes, just tied off the tent on the rear bumper of the car. While Frank was taking his nap one day Friday decided to go to town.

Forgetting he had tied the top to the car, off he went in a roar taking the top with him. Frank gave a bigger roar, thinking a tornado had hit him.

One of the greatest audiences I ever saw was in San Francisco. The city sure appreciated the big show when we played the Cow Palace for the first time in 1948. The show had not been there since 1941.

In 1948 we

really had a great performance. All the production numbers were wonderful, 40 gals in the aerial ballet and the great Holiday spec. The audiences really ate it up and business was tremendous.

This was a date that Art Concello showed some of his uncanny genius.

Waldo Tupper, the general agent, told me the following story, "Concello said early in the winter 'we are going to the coast in '48 and I want to play Frisco several days.'"

The reason Frisco was so hard to play was there was no lot available and they had a lot of restrictions on tents in the city.

"Never mind the restrictions and no lot. I want to play Frisco and Waldo you get it for me."

So Tupper hightailed it there and after day and night meetings for about two week with the powers that be he came up with the permit to show. Now he had to find a lot. Luck was with him, he found one right near Fisher-man's Wharf.

Tupper informed Concello he had everything set to play under canvas. Art said "forget it. I want the Cow Palace now." Well they got the Cow Palace and the rest is history. Big Bertha played the Cow Palace ever after.

The Cow Palace up to that time had about one attraction a year, a stock show and rodeo.

I flew into San Francisco ahead of the show. That night I met Concello on the street and he asked where I had checked into. I told him the St. Francis. He said, "the St. Francis, hell I tried to check in there and they told me they were all filled." I said, "Art you are only the general manager of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and I am a program peddler." I sold plenty of programs that year in the Cow Palace and every year after that.

The Cow Palace is a great place for a circus; it's a long ways from downtown, but every seat is a good one.

A VERY STRONG FINISH

The 2005 CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY CONVENTION. BALTIMORE, MD. JUNE 3-6

Anyone who has been remotely connected with show business knows that a strong finish is critical to any performance. Circus historians certainly subscribe to this axiom and the circus itself almost always had its Hugo Zacchini or his equivalent close the performance and the day. Our president, Al Stencell, if nothing else (and he is much more than this), is a consummate showman. So none of his many friends and admirers was in the least surprised that the Baltimore convention was the strongest of the strong finishes to his four year reign of excellent conventions--Toronto, Peru, and Nyack. Indeed, the Baltimore convention, with its wonderful array of speakers, excellent location, and superior banquet speaker combined to be of the highest echelon of convention presentations in the history of our esteemed organization.

Those who remember Baltimore of the 1950's will be delighted by the revelation that it is the one city in America that has been successful in reinventing itself. Where there were decaying wharves and river rats abounding, these now have been totally replaced with smart walkways, river vistas, beautiful restaurants, and cruises on the waters by

boats a plenty. Couple the water complex with great stadiums housing football and baseball franchises, and a convention housing that rivals any in this United States, and one has an environment that any individual will be pleased to spend his or her valued time in enjoying the ambiance. It is in these surroundings that President Stencell chose to place a measure on his very successful term of office. This writer thinks that he chose well.

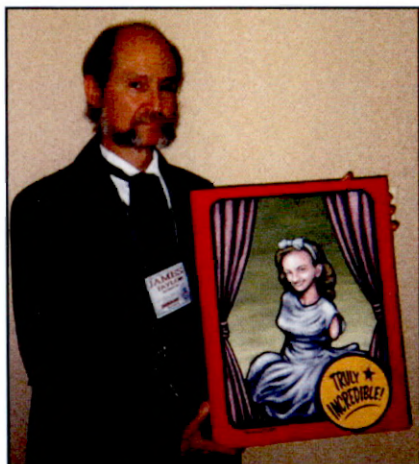
An arrival at the convention hotel, The Days Inn of the Inner Harbor, was not without an adventure unto itself. Many convention participants registered for their rooms mumbling to themselves about the one way streets that caused a direct feeling that they were circling the airport in a heavy fog seeking the appropriate runway for landing. However, once finding the hotel, the smiling faces of Al Stencell and Alan Campbell were manning the registration desk, welcoming the attendees with a Ringling donated shopping bag of interesting circus and local items. It was but a minute that the conventioners located each other for hours of good talk well into the night. Enough of the preliminaries.

Promptly at 0900 hours on Saturday morning, Al took care of house keeping matters giving all a comfort level that everything had been provided for. He then introduced the first speaker, James Taylor, who took his audience on an adventure of creating a living side show museum and maintaining same as a business venture in this very city of Baltimore. He shared the good and less-good decisions in the development and operation of this most interesting project in a fascinating fashion. Not satisfied with the past, Jim has plans for a similar initiative in Washington that will be in competition with the clowns in Congress with a broad focus of America. Jim was followed

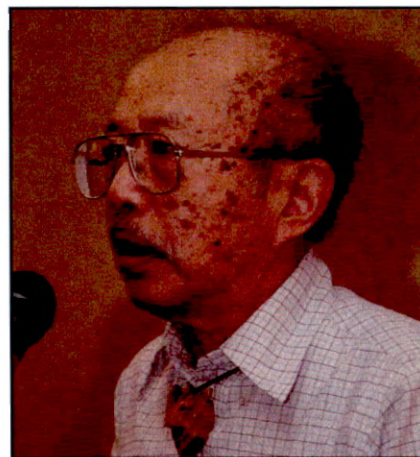
by our most productive author, Bill Slout, who talked about the Great Transatlantic Circus and Menagerie of the early 1870's. What should have been a profitable venture turned out to be one of a beleaguered enterprise ending in great losses and bankruptcy. Bill captured it all in his most enjoyable presentation. The morning concluded with CHS'er Bob Good telling us what it is like in the world of balancing. His captivating personality riveted the sophisticated audience into "hanging on his every word" as he educated us all in the art of hand balancing. A great lead into lunch.

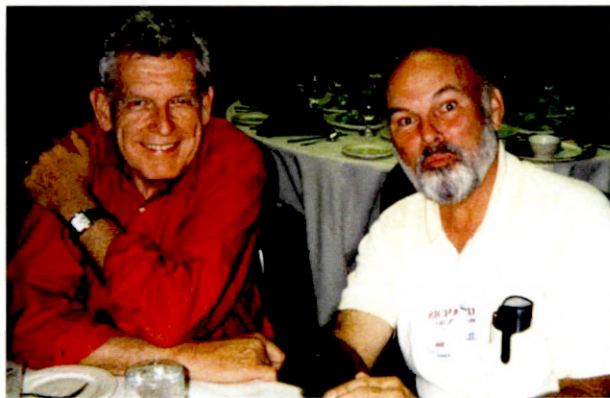
Fred Dahlinger presided over the afternoon session and commenced with a perennial favorite, Stuart Thayer, who told all about the legend of Lalla Rookh, its background in a poem, and the glorification of the theme into a most successful circus pageant. He included much discussion on America's first national beauty contest. Very interesting material, well presented. Reverend Jerry Hogan blessed his audience with the history of the religious side of the circus, commencing so many years ago, and coming to its zenith during the era of Father Ed Sullivan in the late

Presenter James Taylor. Fred Pfening photo.



Presenter Ken Kawata. John Gilmore photo.

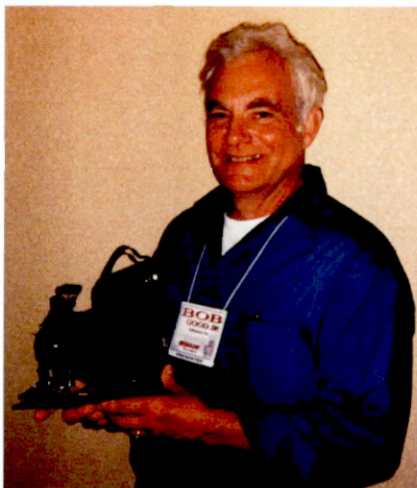




Presenters Brian Liddicoat and Richard Georgian. Fred Pfening photo.

thirties until his death in the early seventies. Jerry took us to the present discussing in detail his life and assignment as "the circus minister (in this case priest)" aiding and abetting the circus performers life style. A strong tip of the hat to Reverend Hogan for his most appreciated contribution to the wherewithal of the present day circus. Fred D. continued with his afternoon session with Richard Georgian and the Russian Cossacks. I now know that the Don Cossacks were never on the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. They could not have been because the Cossacks or their equivalent were not from the River Don region but were from the Georgia region of the former USSR. In fact, friend Richard is descended from these performers and his grandfather had much to do with the success of Buffalo Bill's presentations to the masses. What a

Bob Good with the Kodak folding camera used by his father.



great and revealing recital. The session ended with Bob Good spending his allotted time discussing the photographic work of his father, Robert Good, who in this writer's humble opinion was the finest general photographer of his era. As a buyer almost 60 years ago, I quickly learned

that one never received less than a fine photograph from Mr. Good, the elder. It seems that this was the consensus of the gathering which added to the luster of what Robert Good, the younger, was presenting. The afternoon session ended on this high note.

The day was not complete as President Al had the gathering aligned for an evening's auction. The folks came loaded for bear and engaged in a competitive bidding which contributed almost \$1,500 to Al Campbell's closely held coffers. He was a happy man and it is always a good sign when the treasurer smiles.

With Richard Reynolds overseeing the process, Ken Kawata opened the Sunday morning session with a paper of the post WW II menagerie activities in Japan. Prime Minister Nehru of India sent an elephant as a goodwill gesture to Japan in response to Japanese children pleading with him for such a beast. What followed was a grand tour of much of Japan to enormous interest and financial success. Thereafter, traveling men-ageries criss-crossed Japan for the next quarter century to enthusiastic audiences. He also traced the gradual reduction of interest in menageries to the extent that they hardly exist in the Land of the Rising Sun at present.

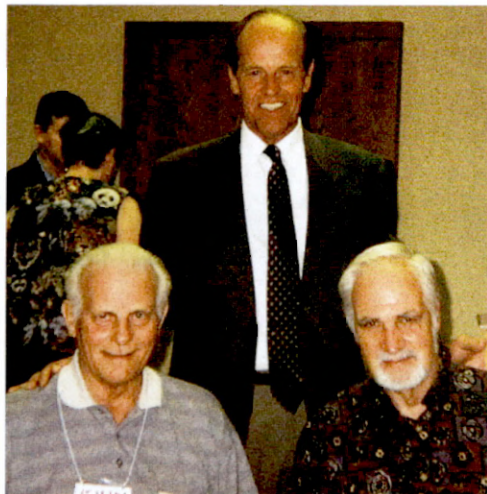
Ken was followed by Brian Liddicoat's revelations regarding the creation of Barnum's KALEIDOSCAPE. While his involvement with this important Feld's venture into the tented arena began after the formulation period, there was still much of the work yet to be done when

he arrived. Work he did and his hard labors delivered a final product that met the demands of Kenneth Feld. It was a very impressive show but did not succeed in the market place. Colleague Brian let it all hang out and delivered a first-rate presentation. The morning session closed with Dick Flint tracing the wanderings of the first elephant touring Europe since the Roman times-1629 to be exact. One continues to be amazed that there was enough information available for Dick to present a riveting story for all to enjoy.

Dick was back to monitor the afternoon presentations. It began with Joe Parker telling all the facts and then some about a fist fight between towners and circus folks in Jacksonville, Texas in 1873. The exchange of blows evolved into gunplay, fire and cutting into the structural supports of a railroad bridge that resulted in the destruction of a freight train but not the intended train of the John Robinson Circus. Joe did not establish a clear winner but Jacksonville, Texas did not see another railroad circus until the 20th century.

We were left with Fred Dahlinger attempting to bring decorum to the process by talking about fire and its place as a traveling show. Not quite as violent as Joe's paper but it had excitement of its own. In the first decade of the 20th century, several showmen introduced the traveling fire shows into the lexicon of show business. They morphed into the

John Herriett, David Rawls and Buckles Woodcock.





CHSers touring the Cirque Du Soleil lot. Ed Linbach photo.

fine showings on the Forepaugh-Sells Circus during the 1906-1907 seasons. Interest in this form of traveling shows waned shortly thereafter and disappeared from sight around the onset of WW I. Nevertheless, during its relatively short life, it provided a very unusual backdrop of a story with which Fred, as he always does, captured the focus of his audience.

How else could this wonderful afternoon end but having President Al regaling the attendees about his experiences with horse shows in Canada over the most recent past. It was well worth the price of admission to hear Al discuss how a couple of enterprising showmen make instant wine to be sold during the performances. And we thought that the horse business was dull. Not to hear Al tell it. Great stuff for all to enjoy. Notice that we did not report that it was great grog as well.

For the banquet, President

The Kelly-Miller elephants. Ed Limbach photo.



Stencell arranged for one of the finest examples of premier circus men in America today, David Rawls, to discuss touring throughout our great land, with his Kelly-Miller circus. Listening to his thoughts and experiences,

there is little doubt why his operation is so successful. His circus gives excellent value and does so with professionalism throughout. A first-class presentation by a first-class guy. A wonderful closer to two days of pleasure.

The next morning your Board of Trustees met to review where we have been over the past year and where we are going in the future. Suffice it to say here that the CHS is in fine shape financially and is working on a plan to bring even more people into the membership rostrum including a dramatic increase in younger members. Many complements were set forth on the work of friend Judy Griffith and her web site (www.circushistory.org). You will be pleased to know that your Board intends to work closely with Judy to further enhance the information on the web site including a most important research venue for active CHS researchers.

A visit to the backyard of Cirque du Soleil followed in the afternoon.

The day concluded with the performance of David Rawls Kelly-Miller Circus. Your fellow CHSers were very impressed.

So there you have it. It was clear to all that President Al Stencell accomplished what he obviously set out to do – A VERY STRONG FINISH. We who attended greatly benefited from his meeting of this high standard. A

job well done. Robert Sabia.

Trustees Meeting

The annual meeting of CHS trustees was held on in Monday morning, June 6, 2005, in Baltimore, Maryland, in connection with the annual convention and meeting of members. The trustees reviewed the affairs of the Society. Treasurer Campbell presented a financial statement which was approved. With prudent management and careful control of expenditures, CHS is in excellent financial condition with a net worth of some \$189,000.

The Trustees noted the need to enlarge the Society's revenue stream through increased membership. Accordingly, Vice President-Trustee Bob Sabia was appointed to chair a committee to explore ways to expand membership. He will appoint the members to work with him on the committee and will report back to the Trustees at the next meeting. The trustees also noted the growing importance of the CHS web site to the Society. It is very successful thanks in large measure to the hard work of CHS member Judith Griffin. Hence, she was appointed to head a committee to explore improvements and to and enhancements of the CHS web site. She will appoint members to work with her on the committee.

The quadrennial election of trustees and officers is at hand. The terms of five trustees expire at the end of 2005, to wit: Fred D. Pfening, III, Richard J. Reynolds, III, Al Stencell, Dave Price, and Alan Campbell. The Trustees nominated all for them for new eight year terms save Dave Price who had advised that he would not be a candidate for another term as trustee. To fill that position on the Board the trustees nominated Judith Griffin. In due course, ballots will be mailed so that the Members may vote on these nominees. Under the Society's Code or Regulations the Trustees elect new Officers. The following were duly nominated and elected for four year terms each, beginning on January 1, 2006 and concluding on December 31, 2009--President: Robert F. Sabia; Vice-President: Judith Griffin, and Secretary-Treasurer: Alan Campbell. Richard J. Reynolds III.

2005 CHS ELECTIONS

This 2005 is a quadrennial election year for CHS. As noted on the previous page the following members have been nominated to serve new eight year terms as Trustees commencing at the beginning of 2006, to wit:

Alan Campbell, a graduate of Pepperdine University, in Los Angeles, was an Air Force pilot during the Viet Nam War, attaining the rank of Lt. Colonel. From 1969 until his retirement in 2000 he flew for Delta Air Lines. Alan lives in the Atlanta suburb of Alpharetta, GA. He joined CHS in 1998 and two years ago was made a CHS Trustee and its Secretary-Treasurer..

Judith Griffin of Appleton, Wisconsin, is a retired teacher holding two degrees in that discipline, her specialty being the care and education of autistic children. Her teaching background uniquely qualifies her to further CHS's education mission. She has been of invaluable service to CHS, having designed and managed the Society's successful

website. She is a relative of James L. Hutchinson, Barnum and Bailey's partner in their 1880s circus.

Fred D. Pfening, III is a graduate of Ohio Wesleyan and holds a master's degree in economic history from Ohio State University. He has been a CHS member almost his entire life, having joined in 1961 when only twelve years old. He is a past President (1986-89), has been as Trustee since CHS was reorganized in 1997, and has served as Managing Editor of *Bandwagon*. He is CEO of the Fred D. Pfening Company, manufacturers of bakery and allied machinery, Columbus, OH.

Richard J. Reynolds, III, of Atlanta, GA holds undergraduate and law degrees from Emory University. He has been a CHS member since 1958, has served as its President (1998-2001) and has been a Trustee since the 1997 reorganization which he spearheaded. He practiced law in Atlanta for 33-years until his retirement from the firm of

Troutman-Sanders in 1991. He has written extensively for *Bandwagon*.

Al Stencell, a Canadian, is current CHS President and has been a trustee since the 1997 reorganization. Al is a retired circus man. He worked his way up through concessions, novelties and bill posting until becoming a showman. From 1973 to 1976 he was part owner of Royal Bros. He and his wife founded and operated Martin and Downs Circus from 1977 to 1983. In 1983 he built Super Circus International and toured it until 1992. A gifted raconteur, his knack for story telling led to him writing two popular books, with a third soon to be published.

Members will elect Trustees via the mailed ballot (See postcard insert). Each member may vote either for a listed nominee or a person the member desires to write-in. To be counted, a write-in vote must be cast for a current CHS member.

CHS member Guy J. Fiorenza of Rockford, IL will serve as Election Commissioner. All ballots must be received by him on or before November 1, 2005. The outcome will be announced in the November-December *Bandwagon*.



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Is committed to opposing the well organized and intense effort to
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And will be listed in the monthly edition of OABA's Showtime
Magazine*





We had two train wrecks when my family and I were on the Cole Bros. Circus in the 1940s. The first was in 1945 while approaching Brainerd, Minnesota. Cecil B. DeMille couldn't have done a better job. I have no idea what caused this wreck but fortunately the wreckage was confined to the equipment section of the flat cars, and no stock cars, coaches or large animal dens were involved. The three people on the left in the first picture are Justino Loyal, Paul Nelson and Cap Curtis.

When we were on the Cole show, my folks shared a berth and I slept in the upper. All I recall about the wreck was my mother waking me up amidst a lot of activity up and down the aisle. There were no pets allowed in the coaches, but #74 wagon, shown in the second picture, had cages for privately owned pets. Our little dog Mickey lived in the bottom cage seen behind the stringer wagon. It was just getting daylight when my mother and I took off through the ruins to find her. Somehow we managed to skinny up on the flat car and I crawled up on something and got her out. I had saved the day.

The third photo shows town people viewing the remains. As I recall it, they spotted the coaches next to the depot in downtown Brainerd and the cookhouse was set up nearby. As a ten year old, I thought all this was pretty nifty with plenty of kids around. I don't remember how long we remained in town, but it must have been at least a week. I don't recall where the animals were kept. They probably set up the menagerie tent somewhere.

The nation still moved on rails in those days. Consequently we had an army of railroad guys working on the tracks and a crane in the background clearing the debris. This last wreck



photo shows the beehive of activity.

Our next photo is of the Gentry Bros. Circus. They were renowned for their dog and pony shows. In fact, after the turn of the century they had four units touring the country. Their shows had typical circus animal acts but also included skits such as the one shown in this picture where the

"scamp dog" has just been arrested by the monkey "police."

During the performance the trouble-making dog would appear without warning and disrupt the act in progress, perhaps by duplicating the trick another dog had done or by doing it backwards. It was a running gag and each time he reappeared the





ringmaster would chase him from the ring. The kids in the audience would scream with delight, wondering what mischief he would get into next.

Ultimately, he would be brought in for trial and a baboon with a wig and gavel would preside. The verdict was always guilty and the dog would be escorted from the tent. The band would play a dirge, and in came a small hearse pulled by two black ponies wearing black plumes and trappings. The dog would get in, and the ponies would make a slow march around the track. This brought considerable alarm to the children, but as the hearse began to exit the tent the rear doors would swing open, and out would come Mr. Scamp on a dead run. He'd do one lap around the



track, then run out the back door as pandemonium broke loose.

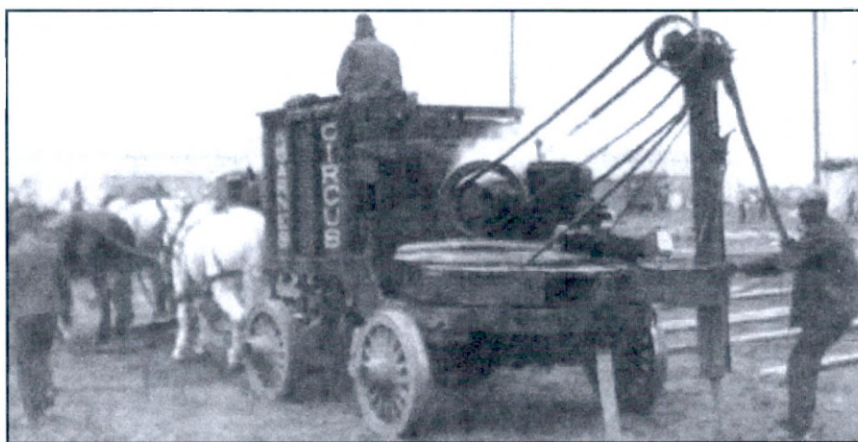
I like this picture looking backward from the flat cars to the coaches on a Sunday run on the Al G. Barnes Circus in 1933. This photo must have been taken in a mountainous area as the railroad placed a second locomotive in the middle of the train, indicating a pretty good climb.

Living conditions on the train were quite cramped, providing only a berth since the people were on the circus lot all day anyway. Consequently, it was common for people on a Sunday run to leave the confinement of the coaches and ride the flat cars during the day. One such party took this picture.

My most pleasant memories of the Ringling show 35 years ago was traveling across the country on the train.

Times had changed, however, and the show provided us with half a railroad car for living accommodations in the "Beverly Hills" section of the train, which had all the facilities of an apartment. Generators provided air conditioning or heat year around. On Sunday evening after the elephants had been loaded in the cars, and fed, I would stroll down to the coaches, climb aboard, have, dinner and watch TV before going to bed. Charly and Araceli Baumann lived in the next coach, and while en route Barbara and I would drop in, have a beer and catch up on the gossip, just like Fred and Ethel Mertz.

The center poles are already up and the stake driver is in action on



Barnes in 1933. When the man pulls the handle two rollers meet, lifting the blade seen at the top. When the handle is returned to its normal position, a large metal block at the bottom of the blade slams into the wooden stake. It looks simple, but it's a tricky piece of business. After a stake is driven the horses pull the wagon ahead to the next position, and the man must pick up a new stake, raise the blade and insert the stake quickly and properly before the weight descends. Many a good man had his shin cracked when the stake got kicked back at him.

Continuing with the 1933 Barnes show, this shot looks like an army is spreading out the big top canvas. In those depression days, three meals a day and cigarettes was a good deal.

As the stake driver on the right continues around the tent we see the tail end of the stringer wagon in the lower right hand corner. Stringers are the long stair-step shaped supports that form the base for the bleachers. The stringers spread out on the ground in the previous picture were used for the grandstand and each step is deeper to hold a wider plank that had a back support, called a bible back, which approximated a chair. The people in the general admission seats, called the blues, had to suffer sitting on a simple wooden plank.

Our last photo is of George Denman, long-time Ringling-Barnum elephant boss. He has completed the march from the railroad, has dismounted from his horse, and is leading the herd into Colt's Park in Hartford, Connecticut on July 9, 1930. The show carried 34 elephants that season, including three males; surprisingly all tuskless, named John, Sammy and Joe. Denman appears quite dapper with his bow tie and riding breeches. All his assistants were expected to wear ties as well as you can see on Cowboy Taylor, behind Denman, and Edward Doherty who is riding big John. This was Denman's 23rd season with the Ringlings, having been in the elephant department with Barnum and Bailey when the Ringlings, purchased that show in 1907. He retired during the 1933 season and was replaced by Bill Emory, another old-timer. Denman died in 1937.

Sides Lights On The Circus Business

PART FORTY-TWO

By David W. Watt

Editor's note. The dates listed are the dates the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Gazette.

June 8, 1918

As usual, the carnival company which has been playing in Janesville this week brought with it its quota of old-timers, all of whom have put in many years in the circus business. It was Tuesday afternoon that an old-timer by the name of John Welch, who has charge of the ponies and dogs with the Kelly Bros. show, told his boss that he must have a half day off to go uptown and visit with his old boss of forty years ago with the Burr Robbins show. Right here I want to say that Tuesday afternoon was the first time I ever knew his real name.

In 1878 John joined the Burr Robbins show and traveled miles over the road with the wagon show, and it was there that he got his name of "Mulesy," and while since then I paid him for more than two years and later was manager for three years, I never knew him by any other name than "Mulesy." While he has since traveled with a dozen or more shows, the name given him that spring in Janesville has allowed him all through his life and but few shows, if any, knew his real name.

"Mulesy" got his hair cut and a shave and put on his best clothes and came uptown, and when he presented himself to me with a smile all over his face, he wanted to know if I recollected him. I knew him in a second and I said to him: "Mulesy, how could anyone ever forget that face of yours?" While we had a long visit which we both enjoyed, "Mulesy" has not kept pace with the times and knew but little about the years he spent with the Burr Robbins show. He did remember the long drives which we took in 1878 through

Kansas and Nebraska and the old man remarked: "There is one thing you did in those days when we had those long drives; you always looked after me to be sure that I was on the right trail."

When I asked the old man how old he was, he smiled and said: "Mr. Watt, you figure it up. I remember well that I was 14 years old when the civil war broke out." While time has slowed up the old man a little, he is the same reliable driver and caretaker that he was more than forty years ago and has charge of the ponies and dogs with the Kelly Bros. show which is considered one of the best pony and dog shows in the country.

It was in the early days of show business that many a man like "Mulesy" was given a fictitious name which would follow him all through life.

I met another friend by the name of J. H. Shields whose home is in Cincinnati and who started in the show business fifty-two years this spring. Mr. Shields can tell many interesting stories of his early life in the business, and for years he was with the best circuses in the country. For some three years he was purchasing agent for the Barnum show when it was a wagon show.

In 1868 and 1869 Mr. Shields was

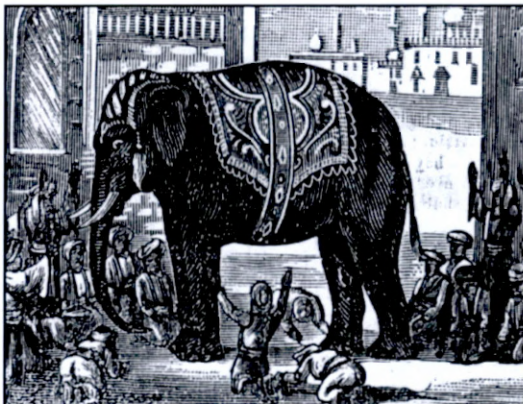
with the D. R. Thayer show which a few years later failed and in 1875 and 1876 was a clown with the Burr Robbins show. He was also with the Montgomery Queen show for two seasons which, by the way, was one of the finest shows on the road for its time. A few years later Montgomery Queen failed and in 1874 Adam Forepaugh sent a letter to his home in New York and had him come to Chicago and be his guest for two weeks.

After the dose of the engagement in Chicago, Montgomery Queen left for his home in New York and when he bid me good-by he said: "Adam Forepaugh has certainly given me two weeks of pleasure and sunshine that I shall never forget."

While in a business way Adam Forepaugh was always looking for the last dollar, it was many times that he did nice things for old-timers in the business that cost him hundreds of dollars. Mr. Shields also put in two weeks with the J. E. Warner show which, at that time, made its winter quarters at Lansing, Michigan. A little later the Warner show failed and Mr. Warner was for two seasons the general manager of the Adam Forepaugh show and in 1884 went with the show in Lansing.

Adam Forepaugh, his wife and myself were guests at dinner at the Warner home, and after Mr. Warner's retirement from the business, he was local mayor some two or three times. The old Warner home, which stands on a rise of ground in the outskirts of the city, is still pointed out to visitors as the home of J. E. Warner, circus man and many times the "Mayor of Lansing." Mr. Shields has the distinction of starting the first 10 cent real circus under canvas and his opening was made in New Orleans in the early seventies.

Mr. Shields has visited all the European countries and made several trips to Australia, Central and South America. He is also one of the oldest Elks in the country, belonging to a lodge in Memphis, Tenn., where he joined thirty years ago last winter. Although he has been in circus and carnival business thirty years, he never took a drink of any kind of intoxicants, never smoked a cigar or took a chew of



tobacco, which is something of a record for a man above 70 who has put all of his best life under canvas. For several years Mr. Shields has made Cincinnati his home.

Columbus, Ohio a few days ago had a real tie-up for some time of its city street car traffic. It was circus day and during the parade one of the old elephants stopped on the car tracks and simply laid down and breathed her last in a few minutes. It was more than an hour before they could remove the animal so that street car traffic could be resumed.

Wartime involves special need of cheering amusements, so long evidence in the theatrical activities of Europe's war-weary capitals. The relaxation required at present by the American public could not be provided in any way more seasonable and suitable and capable than by the great American circus. It is a democratic institution worth conserving for the country's sake as well as for its own. It has educational aspects, though in most men's minds these are talking points rather than causes of action, as everybody knows. It links generation to generation in a bond cruel time is powerless to loose. It popularizes; childhood days, if only for a day, and blesses youth with a day of days whose memory can outlast many a future sorrow. It confers upon us all the boon of a brief stay in the tented land of pure delight where every prospect pleases and joy is unconfined.

June 15, 1918

The latest reports from all the big shows on the road is to the effect that they have never been handled better by the railroads and are almost invariably in town on time in the morning and the engines and crews are always ready to pull out at night as soon as everything is loaded. Both the Barnum and Ringling shows run in four sections which necessitates four crews and four engines. Last winter there was more or less doubt as to their being handled on time, yet even on their longest runs, they have managed to get in on schedule time.

The moving of the time one hour ahead is about the only thing the big shows are not exactly pleased with, for the reason that so much daylight in the evening makes people late get

A Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus newspaper ad used in 1918.

ting to the show. Instead of the performance starting at 8 o'clock, it is usually 8:30 before the people all get in the tent for the grand entry. But this will regulate itself in time and it will not be long until things will be running as smoothly as on the old schedule.

The only show thus far to exhibit in this part of the country is the Hagenbeck-Wallace show which will exhibit in Monroe June 24 and Beloit June 25. If Janesville is fortunate enough to get one of the big shows this season, it will probably be the Ringling show later in the summer.

The expense of taking the big shows over the road now is very different to what it was thirty years ago. In my time with the Adam Forepaugh show we had sixty-six cars back of the show and three advertising cars in advance, and the trains were always made up in three sections which made three long trains as all the cars were sixty feet in length. It was seldom that our

transportation then was over \$350 or \$400 a move, but now it is seldom that a big show gets moved from town to town for less than double that amount. When the contracting agent makes out his route by way of Northwestern or St. Paul, he contracts for the number of towns with the railroad for so much money. Then it is divided by the number of towns and transportation is paid in advance every day. In my time in the business there was only one road that we did not settle with every day and that was the Pennsylvania. Whether we made six or a dozen or more towns on that line, we would usually wait until ready to leave that road and then send a draft on New York for the entire amount. This I was always glad to do, for it was my business to see that the transportation was paid.

It is surprising how many men who have volunteered from the ranks of showmen are utilizing their various talents and trades in helping Uncle Sam win the war. Ray Thompson, equestrian director who just opened his season with Coop & Lent's circus, was notified by the government that he was needed, and he at once left for Camp Sheldon, Mississippi, where he will work for an officer's commission. Being a thorough horseman, Mr. Thompson will offer his knowledge of horses and riding in training officers for the cavalry. He leaves his wife and two year old baby with the show, and to John Miller he will entrust the care of his horses. Miller will also assume charge of the arena.

Despite the big prices now charged, Cleveland turned out en masse to welcome the Ringling circus. The heavy storms failed to turn back the crowds that filled the huge tent. Business, in fact, has been great all along the line, the parades getting out on time and the performances starting as per schedule.

The draft officials called upon the show in Cleveland and asked for each man's classification card. This took place between performances at the cook tent when most of the boys had left their cards in the dressing tents. It looked like a big haul until things were explained to the officials who immediately released the boys so that they could get their cards. It

took about thirty minutes for the officials to find out that the show had no slackers. Moral: Showmen in the draft; always keep your registration cards right about you.

About ten men left the show at Cleveland to answer the call of Uncle Sam. Ottokar Bartik, the ballet master, rejoined the aggregation at this point and girls gave a special display of dancing for him.

Tom Buckley is mourning the loss of this dear mother. All of the folks with the show extended their sympathy to him in his bereavement.

There is a story in the old Second Reader about a monkey that, on the authority of Mr. Aesop, always burst into tears when strolling through a cemetery. When a reporter once asked him what ailed him, he sobbed: "I always weep like that when I am reminded of my poor dead ancestors."

William Chambers, superintendent of Ringling Bros. menagerie, used to study the Second Reader. Just now he studies seven-ton elephants, big hippopotami and about a thousand other charges in fur and feather. But most of all he studies monkeys. He never tires of gathering a crowd around one of the simian hostilities in the menagerie tent on circus day to give illustrated lectures on "monology." He never fails to tell that old story from the Second Reader.

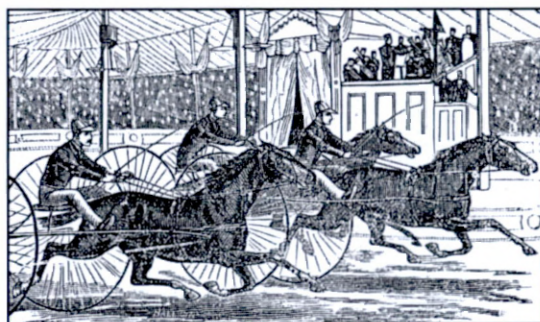
Chambers asserts that the monkeys attract more attention than any other species of animal in all the 108 cages of the Ringling zoo, because Mr. Monkey is a born actor. He turns every cage into a theater and so captures the crowd.

June 22, 1918

It was about the middle of September 1877 that the Adam Forepaugh show exhibited in Springfield, Missouri. As the show was to winter in Oakland, California, that season, notices were posted in the dressing rooms that the season proper would close about a month later in Fremont, Nebraska, where the show would be reorganized and only about four towns were to be visited while crossing the desert.

As a few of the old timers, both drivers and canvasmen, were not in favor of going to California, several

new people signed up to make the trip, among these a bachelor of about forty years of age joined out with the show. He was a thorough horseman and for several years he had been very anxious to go to California. This man, whose name I have long since forgotten, made the trip and was one of the caretakers of the horses with the show during the winter in Oakland.



At the time that the show was to leave California for the east, this man found employment on a ranch belonging to a millionaire where trotters and pacers were bred and educated. Among these was one that was the fastest trotter on the ranch and proved to be an outlaw, and the man who made the trip to California with the circus seemed to be the only man that could handle and care for the outlaw trotter. Although he was a dangerous horse to handle, the old caretaker never crossed him in any way. He always had two or three lumps of sugar in his pocket or two or three cookies which the horse would always be looking for when his caretaker put in an appearance.

It was several years later that the owner of the ranch died and when the will was read, it was found that the old caretaker had been left a few hundred dollars and the outlaw horse, whose name at the time he was foaled was "Klamath."

At one of the big June meetings the famous outlaw and its owner came direct from California to Janesville, where he was started on a 2:12 trot. At that time I was delegated by the association to help find quarters, not only for horses, but also for the owners. In the meantime the owner of Klamath had married one of the domestics in the household of the ranch owner. When they landed in Janesville the party consisted of the man, his wife, their outlaw trotter

and a large white bulldog. While there was a good stall reserved for the horse at the fair grounds, the old couple and the white bulldog found a comfortable home at the Highland House which, at that time, stood on or near the present site of the *Gazette* building.

By horsemen, the outlaw was looked upon as a dangerous rival, for a thorough horseman like his owner would hardly ship direct to Janesville from California unless he was sure he had a good one in his clasp which the outlaw proved to be. The owner, something like a year or more before, conceived the idea of blindfolding his horse which proved to be the undoing of the outlaw for from that day on he relied entirely upon his driver who never dared to put a whip

to him. In all his races the old man would talk to him and although he was slow to get away from the wire, as soon as the starter gave the word, the old man and his outlaw horse were always in the hunt.

While he would win his race in three straight heats, he was never in the lead when they turned into the home stretch, and here the old man would pull his horse to the outside and leaning well over the horse's hips he would call to him saying, "eat him up, cookie, eat him up. Eat him up, cookie." "Cookie" was the name given him by his owner on account of the horse being fond of them. At the time that the field of horses would turn into the stretch, they thought that they had Cookie beat, but he was through first under the wire and it was said that in the last heat, he came the last quarter in twenty-nine seconds which was the fastest ever over that track.

Later, at the Highland House, while visiting with the old man and his wife, he told me that if it hadn't been for the Adam Forepaugh show, he would never have seen California or owned the famous trotter. After leaving Janesville, they went east through the big circuit. There I think that they won everywhere in their class and there was one Cookie who certainly had some Ginger in it.

A touching tribute of one showman to the memory of another was witnessed at Rochester, New York on

Memorial Day when Louis E. Cooke, who had been identified with many of the biggest amusement enterprises in the world, paid a flying visit to this city to decorate the graves of Kit Carson Cody and his sister, children of the renowned showman, Hon. William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill). With an automobile loaded with the choicest plants the Flower City had to offer, Mr. Cooke made his way to Mount Hope Cemetery where, with the assistance of gardeners, he decorated the little graves that had been cared for so many years by Mr. Cody himself.

It was only a short time after he returned from the cemetery that he was interviewed and said, "I was only a couple of hundred miles from here when the thought came to me of Memorial Day, and then I began to wonder if the graves of the children of the beloved Buffalo Bill would be cared for this year. You know the old gentleman always made it a point to see that those little graves were properly cared for, so I determined to come on and see to it myself. I knew that the tomb of our departed friend would be visited by hundreds of people on Memorial Day."

A few days ago I heard a bunch of soldiers singing the new song entitled, *Where Do We Go From Here?* This carried me back many a day, for with the Adam Forepaugh show after the crowd had gone into the show in the afternoon and hundreds of stragglers were hanging around, every few minutes some one would step up to the wagon and say, "Where do you go from here?"

As I had two pay days every week, it was many times a nuisance, for just when I would be the busiest paying off the men, especially the working men on Saturday afternoon when there would be between 400 and 500 lined up waiting patiently for their salary, many a time an outsider would push his way in and ask, "Where do you go from here?" This had gone from my mind years ago until I heard the little group of soldiers singing, *Where Do We Go From Here?*

I recollect well one Saturday afternoon when the thermometer said more than ninety in the shade and I had just got through selling a turn

away business and the line of working men had formed outside and I had just commenced calling their name and number as they filed up and an old gentleman pushed his way in and in a nice polite way said: "Please, Mister, where do you go from here?" I did not answer him but gave him a look that I think chilled everyone that was near and kept on paying off the men. The old man backed up out of the way and waited for nearly an hour to get a chance to apologize for breaking in such an abrupt manner and said: "I had several visitors at the house and at dinner this question came up and no one seemed to know where you people went, so I thought I would be the wise one and take home the news." I had quite a visit with him and when he bid me goodbye, he said, "I will be careful and not push myself in such an abrupt manner again." But the question was asked from four to twenty times by someone every afternoon. "Where do you go from here?"

To Beloit next Tuesday to see the great Hagenbeck-Wallace show and to be back in the business again for a day and will tell you all about it next Saturday night.

June 29, 1918

As I promised you last week that I would attend the Hagenbeck-Wallace show in Beloit on Tuesday and tell you all about it in this article, I will fall short as I cannot tell all I learned or describe the scenes. On Tuesday afternoon reporters from all over, especially the big papers in Chicago and Milwaukee, were in Beloit. While these men are known to be the best newsmen in the country, when they come to tell all about it, one-half will never be told.

I was on the show grounds early in the morning, spent the day there, went through the front door through to the dressing room and on my entering the dressing room, I was soon one of the mourners at the funeral. Men and women were sitting on their trunks, one-half of them ready to go out in the parade which was soon to take place, with their faces buried in their handkerchiefs, for friends, or possibly a brother or a sister, husband or wife.

There were four of us there including myself that were with the old



William "Bud" Gorman.

Adam Forepaugh show thirty years ago this summer, and the other three had been in the business continually ever since, traveled in every civilized country in the world, passed through all kinds of danger, but this seemed to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

Bud Gorman, the equestrian director with the show and has been for ten or twelve years, is a veteran in the business. He was on duty all afternoon blowing his whistle for the acts, all of which were on time, but in several instances, there were a dozen or fifteen that would show up, more than one-half being gone, and while the old equestrian director went through with the show on schedule, the tears were running down his cheeks continually. In two or three cases when his whistle would blow for certain acts, two or three were so grief stricken that they would not show up.

The young lady who played the [line missing] possibly as well as she ever played it, yet all through the parade thousands of people noticed the tears rolling down her cheeks and it was for a sister that was instantly killed in the wreck that she was mourning for.

All the gaiety went on just the

same, bands playing their usual pieces and to many onlookers, the circus parade looked the same. At the grounds the big top was a new one raised in Beloit for the first time and one of the best in the business. It is 185 feet round top with five 60 foot middle pieces making it in all 485 feet long.

Strange as it may seem, it was the old veterans in the business that the terrible blow seemed to affect the worst. The only way that I can account for this is that it took many of the big families that had lived together for so many years that to them it was like losing a brother or a sister.

When the show opened in the afternoon, every act was given just the same, the grand entry, the aerial acts, the lion tamers, the educated horses, with a few in every act missing. One of the most notable ones to me was the trained lions and tigers who had been handled for so many years by the old trainers, and after the understudies who came to the front, none of the animals seemed to quite understand; they were slower than with the old master and were hard to put into submission. But the different trainers who came to the front were absolutely faultless, and while the act took a little longer, it was given in detail the same as with the old trainer.

Much credit is due to them for having courage enough to come to the front and give to the public the show that they did. While watching the performance, I said to myself. "Is there another business in the world that could pass through such a terrible ordeal that the Hagenbeck-Wallace show has gone through and come back in 48 hours more than a hundred miles away from the scene of the tragedy and open up again for business. I don't think it possible for any but the circus that could come back. Few, if any, of the performers left the show and if they did, it would only be for a day or two. They need the business and it would occupy their minds which would be much better than to sit down with nothing to do but mourn for the dead ones. Charles Gollmar, manager of the show, and his wife were in the state room, neither of them receiving anything but slight bruises, but it

unnerved Mrs. Gollmar to the extent that she went to her home in Baraboo where she thought that she would be contented to remain. Harold and Harry Ballard, the nephews of Edward Ballard, the owner of the show, also escaped with slight bruises.

As soon as the news of the terrible accident reached Chicago, the committee from the Showmen's League of America was immediately dispatched to the scene and only a short time after a delegation of women from the Women's Auxiliary of the league arrived on the scene, all with willing hands and opened arms ready to do anything in their power to relieve the suffering of their friends. On Wednesday afternoon 53 victims of the accident were buried in one grave in Woodlawn Cemetery with more than 1,500 relatives and friends paying their last tribute to the lost ones. Joe Coyle, a famous clown, had some weeks ago promised his boy and girl that when school was out, they should come with their mother and pay him a visit for two weeks. The mother and both children were lost. Mr. and Mrs. Coyle, father and mother of the clown and also Mrs. Coyle's father and mother were there at the burial. It will be many years before this grave where 53 of the victims were laid to rest will be neglected on Decoration Day. The Showmen's League as well as all the big circuses in the country will look after that as well as the relatives of the victims.

Many of the performers in Beloit on Tuesday afternoon that were cut and bruised in different ways went into the ring and went through with their acts. Although some of them were in great pain, they smiled their recognition to the audience when they gave them an encore the same as though nothing had happened, although when they reached their dressing rooms, many of them broke down and cried bitterly. May I never live to visit another circus under like circumstances.

July 6, 1918

From 1886 up to the time that Adam Forepaugh died that year was known as a Jonah season for the reason that the show had seven wrecks during that season. While two of

them proved fatal to the lives of the people, two or three others were very disastrous to the stock and animals. The worst wreck of all occurred at a small station where the second section of the show stopped for water, which was about ten miles from Waterville, Maine where the show was to exhibit the following day. The middle section of the show (for they were running in three sections) stopped for water and neglected to send any warning back to the train following and consequently there was a head-end collision.

While possibly there were not more than twenty-five or thirty houses in the town, the wreck made an awful noise and I guess every man, woman and child in the little village was sent out to see what had happened. In this wreck three people were killed, one being a working man known as a canvasman. One of the men killed was a man who stood six feet two and was known around the show as "Big Jim." Like many others in those days he was on the payroll as "Big Jim" and no other name was known. Big Jim had a partner who had been with him through Philadelphia in 1876 and in the spring of 1877 the two friends joined the Forepaugh show. This was the season that the show went through to the coast and wintered there, returning east in the spring. The two canvasmen who were friends and always seen together had been with the show something like over ten years when Big Jim was called. In this wreck there were thirty-three horses killed and several cars demolished, but the remaining crew was soon in Waterville and the show was given, two performances, just the same as though nothing had happened.

The other unfortunates were on the payroll under their own names and the town from which they came from so that their bodies were sent to their homes and the men with them in the show paying all expenses. In the little town where the wreck occurred, the name of which I have long since forgotten, "Big Jim," unknown, was buried in the village cemetery. The partner came to the funeral from Waterville to look after Big Jim's burial, bringing a minister

with him. There were three or four of the shows that stayed back and paid the expenses; among them was Jim's old partner. The two had agreed years before that whatever happened to either of them, the surviving one was to stick by until the end. When Big Jim was lowered into the grave, his old partner with tears streaming down his cheeks leaned over and looking into the grave said: "Goodbye, Jim. I have done as I have agreed for I am here with you to the end."

It was two days before Big Jim's partner caught up with the show and before joining, he stopped in Waterville, Maine where the show had exhibited the day before and bought an unpretentious but fair-sized stone to be placed at

Big Jim's grave. The inscription read: "Big Jim, an employee of the Adam Forepaugh show, died in a railroad wreck in this village in 1886." It is fair to say that up until now strangers in the little village are shown Big Jim's grave which is always pointed out as one of the points of interest in the little village. His partner after joining the show came to the ticket wagon and told me what the little monument cost. I immediately sent a draft to the monument man in Waterville, Maine, and the next pay day the working men of the show dropped in the hat more than enough money to pay all the expenses of Big Jim's funeral. It mattered not whether the man was known or unknown whether he was a performer or a working man. If he met with an accident of any kind, he was always cared for and given the best.

Before leaving Big Jim's grave his old partner said: "Jim, I don't know just where you have gone, but I do know one thing--you have gone where good people go and that is good enough. Good-bye, Jim."

John B. Warren of Chicago, who for several years has been president of the Showmen's League of America, died at his home on the south side of Chicago Sunday afternoon. Mr. Warren was a man of wealth and culture and one of the finest gentlemen I ever knew in or out of the business. Immediately upon receipt of the news of the terrible accident of the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus, Mr.



Warren, with all the members of the Showmen's League that he could get together, took a train for the scene of the accident. In less than two hours after their arrival, all of them, under the direction of John B. Warren, worked unceasingly to do everything possible to relieve the suffering of the victims. Their work was not done until the fifty-three victims were laid to rest in Woodlawn Cemetery in Chicago where the Showmen's League owned a large plot of ground where the unknown and many others who had put in many years, the best of their life in the circus business, were laid to rest.

A week ago last Monday after the minister had said the last prayer over the graves, John B. Warren spoke for the Showmen's League and in part he said that when his time came, he would like to be buried at the side of these victims with many of whom he spent years of the best in his life. While I have not received a detailed account of Mr. Warren's life work, it has always been one filled with activity and was with a feeling for his fellow men. Next week I will give you more of an account of his life work, and I know no tribute to pay Mr. Warren than what Big Jim's partner said over his grave. "John, I don't know where you have gone, but you have gone where good people go and that is good enough."

For the last three or four years a man by the name of "Eddy" who had been a clown with one or two of the smaller shows, had an ambition to be a light-weight champion in the fighting game, but I don't think he was high class enough either in the circus or in the fighting ring to win many honors. Something more than a year

The mass grave in Woodlawn Cemetery in Chicago, Illinois of those lost in the Hagenbeck-Wallace train wreck. Pfening Archives.

ago Eddy enlisted and for some time has been in France. A short time ago a friend of his received a letter from him which said: "I have had the gloves on with the Boches several times and I will tell you, John, there is nothing to it. If Uncle Sam will send us plenty of bait, we will catch them." This sounds as though Eddy, the little clown, is doing his part.

July 13, 1918

It was back in the early 50's [1847] that two brothers by the name of Mabie bought a large tract of land in Delavan, Wisconsin, much of it bordering on the now famous Delavan Lake. These men were among the early showmen in the country and possibly had the largest circus and menagerie in their time. This was the commencement of making Delavan famous as the home of the big shows the country over.

It was along about this time [1880-1881] that P. T. Barnum bought land and erected buildings in Bridgeport, Connecticut as winter quarters for the P. T. Barnum show. This is also the commencement of making Bridgeport, Connecticut famous the world over as the home of the great Barnum and later Barnum & Bailey show. It was not long after this that the great Van Amburgh show settled in Connorsville, Indiana, where they made their winter quarters for many years. This also put Connorsville, Indiana on the map as the winter quarters of that show.

It was in the summer of '64 that

Adam Forepaugh came on through Philadelphia and bought the Mabie show in Delavan and traveled to Chicago and then shipped it over the Pennsylvania road to Philadelphia, where Adam Forepaugh built the finest winter quarters ever known in the show business.

This was the winter quarters of the great Adam Forepaugh show until the time of his death on January 24th [1890]. In '70 and '71 (1872) the Sells Brothers located in Columbus, Ohio. It was there that the winter quarters of the Sells Brothers were located up to the time of the death of the last of the Sells brothers when it was sold at auction.

The W. W. Cole show located at Independence, Iowa, the Burr Robbins show at Janesville, Wisconsin, Ringling Bros. at Baraboo, Wisconsin, Buffalo Bill show at Denver, Colorado, and last, but not least in fame, Col. George Washington Hall, better known as "Popcorn George" located his belongings in the show world at Evansville, Wisconsin.

The locating of all these famous shows in their day advertised the towns in which they were located all over the country. While Popcorn George never owned a Ringling or a Forepaugh show, his name was famous the world over, not only as one of the first to inaugurate the one-ring circus, but also as an inventor of the popcorn ball and brick.

I am not lauding the inventor of the popcorn ball or brick from a selfish standpoint, for if I did, I might choose to husk it in the field or eat it in any form, head or tail for the decision. It was only a short time ago that one of the great newspapers of London, England, gave nearly a column or over of their valuable space to the life work of "Popcorn George." Last week the Christian Science Monitor published in Boston the following on



A Col. G. W. Hall Circus parade wagon.

the life work of Rock County's famous showman: "A recent biographical sketch of the inventory of the popcorn brick, a delicacy in the confection line that has lured countless millions to the 'canvassed dome,' awakens memories untinged with gloom. The canvassed dome, it might be explained incidentally, is the poetic name for what the ringmaster invariably, even down to our time, calls the 'main pavilion,' and what the 'profession' is content to designate as the 'big top.' In other words, and to be still more explicit, it is the performance tent of the circus.

"It is quite possible that if all the

The Columbus, Ohio winter quarters of Sells Bros. is depicted in this 1882 litho. Cincinnati Art Museum collection.



molasses or treacle-cemented popcorn bricks consumed in America since George Washington Hall first offered them to the circus-going public, back in the early 50's, were placed end to end, the girdle thus formed would encircle the earth a dozen times.

"George Washington Hall, like a great majority of the early promoters of the circus in America,

from Yankee Robinson down to Phineas T. Barnum, was a New Englander. Finding himself in the great city of New York, about the middle of the last century, penniless, homeless and hungry, he fortunately remembered that there was another New Hampshire man of his acquaintance in the place, an editor, who would surely have ready money and as surely be generous in the use of it.

"Going to this editor, who was busy producing copy at the time, Hall asked for a loan of \$10 and was, in editorial fashion, promptly accommodated, wrote out his 'I.O.U.' and departed. It was while eating his first square meal for a month in a Bowery restaurant that the borrower conceived the idea of cementing popcorn with some glutinous material 'bricking' it, and using it to induce a larger attendance at circuses. He molded and hand pressed some sample lots, took out his I.O.U. and started out upon a career of prosperity, first as a circus vendor and later as a circus manager.

"It would be unfair to attribute all the success of the one-ring circus of the fathers to the popcorn brick, but to the invention of the man who came to be known the country over as 'Popcorn George' belongs much of the credit, because interest in the circus for its own sake was at a very low ebb when the popcorn brick was put forward as a drawing attraction.

"It is not intended to

imply that the one-ring circus did not possess intrinsic artistic merit. Thousands of people will be found today who, if properly approached, will declare without hesitation that for exhilarating music, for thrilling grand entrees, for spectacular bareback, balloon and ring riding, for exciting acrobatic feats, for high and lofty tumbling, for innumerable other things, the one-ring circus was head and shoulders above the three-ring enterprise in its palmiest days. One of these honest deponents will probably add: 'Of course, the popcorn brick had a great deal to do with making the one-ring circus entertainment all that could be desired.'

"And he is very likely to conclude: 'No doubt the popcorn brick had its drawbacks; but what of that? A circus should be a social function demanding full dress and strict observance of the conventions. Half the fun of going to a circus in my time, when one went alone or with an adult companion, and all the fun when one took the children, was in getting democratically sticky.'"

The question that is now bothering not only the kiddies, but many grown ups is, "Will Janesville have the chance this summer to get democratically sticky?"

July 20, 1918

While on my recent visit to the Hagenbeck-Wallace show in Beloit, I had a long visit with my old friend, John White, a veteran door tender. During our conversation over the old days, an old driver happened to pass by whose face looked very familiar to me and I said: "John, who is that man that just passed by?" John said: "That is an old driver here with the show, and when it comes to names, Dave, you know as well as I do, that then they join a show many times they give a nickname which they went by with the last show with which they traveled. He is an old-time driver and his name might be 'Blackhorse Frank,' 'Big Whitey,' or possibly 'Bobby Burns' if he is a Scotchman. You know how those things go with the big shows." I then told John that I had all those names on the payroll in the old Adam Forepaugh show and for years back, I thought it strange that some one of the tie tourists did not choose one.

Two men that had become famous the world over were "Bath House Jim," and "Hinkey Dink," also back still farther the late "Dutchy Lehman," who became famous the world over and the founder of the great Fair Store at the corner of State and Adams Streets in Chicago.

"Well," said John, "I shall not attempt to tell you any more about nicknames, for you seem to have a memory, Dave, that never forgets, but there is one thing you said about me three years ago when you wrote up the show in your paper. While you said I was one of the best door tenders in the business, you also stated that there was a reason for it, for I had one of those frozen faces. When



the average patron of the show looked at me, they would not dare to try and take a child by me for half fare even if they went more than 30 days over the limit. If that story of yours had been well circulated around the show, I am sure that from that time on John White would have been known around here as 'Frozen Face.' If you speak of me again, just please call me 'Plain John White.'"

A letter from the *Billboard* has the following to say of the passing of John B. Warren, president of the Showmen's League of America and also of his successor, Edward C. Talbott: "At a meeting of the Showmen's League of America, held last evening, resolutions of regret and sympathy were passed by the league for the great loss sustained by the organization in the passing away of the beloved president, John B. Warren. Brother Warren was one of the founders of the Showmen's League of America and devoted his time, thought and energy to the building up of the organization which will always stand as a monu-

ment of his thoughtful care and affection for the men of the great outdoor amusement world. His loss will be keenly felt for all time to come, but the wonderful spirit of brotherly love fostered and inculcated into his work at all times will live forever.

"Edward C. Talbott, former vice-president of the league, was elected to serve out the unfinished term of office of our beloved president.

"Mr. Talbott is a man of broad understanding, a showman of many year's standing with a thorough knowledge of the needs and wants of his fellow members. He will have the hearty cooperation and support of every brother in the organization in carrying on and perpetuating the wonderful work of the Showmen's League of America."

Lea Hamilton and Simon Roberts, members of the Sells-Floto shows, recently circulated a Smoke Fund paper for the Sammies and raised an amount around the \$45 mark. The proceeds were used to send tobacco to some of the Sells-Floto circus boys who are now in service. Among the latter, who are likely now enjoying the smokes, are: Duke Mills, "Toto," Ed Hammer and Art Adair at Camp Lewis; "Curley" Davis at San Diego; Joe "Happy" Brandon in New York; Henry Boucher, at San Francisco, and Bill Sobule at Camp Mead.

At the first bugle on July 4 at Albany, New York, the raising of the service flag in the performers' tent took place. Six boys have left the show from the dressing tent. Mr. George Hartzell offered up a prayer for the boys who have gone. The flag was donated by the clowns of the show.

A committee consisting of Messrs. Hartzell, Tripp and Wirth arranged one of the finest programs of amusements ever gotten up with the show for a celebration of the Fourth. Twelve events of racing were given, also a four-round boxing exhibition and a side-splitting watermelon contest by four of the colored boys. Through the contest, Dudley Reed was taking moving pictures for the *Mutual Weekly*. To give the celebration a good start-off, the Ladies' Knitting Club posed for the pictures with a large service flag containing over 300 stars as a background.

Prizes were given to the winners of each event. Among the winners were May Wirth, Lulu Davenport, Ada Orton, Elliott sisters, Irene Nelson, Stella Wirth, Minnie Davis, Roy McDonald, Hillary Long, Dan Curtis and Phil St. Leon. The four-round boxing contest turned out to be an exciting affair. During this event a subscription was taken up for the Red Cross and the sum of \$55 was realized. Later a dance was given in the Masonic Hall which was also a grand success. During the dance Mr. Hartzell introduced District Attorney Laird, who made a short speech in a few well-chosen words. When Mr. Laird took the platform, he received a royal welcome and when he finished, the applause was deafening. In finishing his remarks Mr. Laird said: "When you write to your professional papers, tell them that the city of Auburn welcomes all showfolk."

A word of thanks is due the local Masonic members of Albany who not only turned over their beautiful temple, dance room and supper, but also lent every assistance in making the occasion a huge success. Mr. Boyd and his assistants of the privilege car also deserve thanks for the feast they prepared, donating their services gratis. Also the others who helped to make it a wonderful day and evening for the folks of the Ringling show. George McSparron's band played and several songs were rendered. Joe Motyn rendered Little Gray Home in the West and was forced to give an encore. Mrs. McSparron also had to submit encores while May and Stella Wirth sang and played delightfully, showing that riding is not their only endowment. The down band furnished the music for the afternoon sports.

This certainly looks like you could leave it to the circus folks and they will do their bit.

July 27, 1918

When I was in the business and many times hundreds of miles from home, if there was any one thing that gave me pleasure, it was the meeting of old friends from home. While in Beloit some three weeks ago waiting for the Hagenbeck-Wallace parade, I dropped into a hardware store of Murdock & Dunwiddie for they were



Jules Turnour, the clown. John and Mable Ringling Art Museum, Glasier collection.

two Green County boys and neighbors many years ago. After a few minutes' visit with Mr. Murdock, he said: "Dave, I have three friends out here waiting to see the parade that I want to introduce to you." These proved to be three sisters, one of them the wife of Mr. Murdock, and the older of the trio a school day friend of mine long before I knew what a circus was.

After we had visited a few minutes, Mrs. Lonbarnes of Brodhead said to me: "Dave, I think this is the first visit I have had with you since the terrible night that we got lost in a blinding snow storm trying to find our way home from a spelling school down in Spring Grove. With apology to my school girl friend, this was a half century and then some years ago, and although Father Time, who holds the only receipt for coloring white, had put some white coloring in her hair. Yet the same voice and the same smile was still there, and I could not think it possible that time had wrought so little change.

The night we ventured to the spelling school the thermometer was twenty below zero and the blinding snow storm was raging, yet the weather conditions were little thought of, for to spelling school we must go. When we started for home

the storm was so terrific that we got lost and it was well after midnight before we drove up in front of the Dunwiddie homestead where an anxious father and mother were still awaiting our arrival. The visit I had with my friends at Beloit I will never forget, for many an instance was mentioned by my school day friends that I have long since forgotten. The party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Murdock of Beloit; Neuton Dunwiddie of Beloit; Mrs. Lonbarnes of Brodhead, and Mrs. Cronk of Madison, and the writer.

Boys, I want to give you a little advice which should be of value to you as it comes from one who has had experience in both. When you want to take your best girl out for a good time, don't take her to spelling school when the thermometer is registering twenty below zero, but wait until it is hovering ninety above in the shade and take her to the circus. If you lose your way going home (and I would not blame you if you did) you will at least take no chances of being frozen to death.

The following letter received from New York tells of an interesting story of the wise old elephant: "Big Alice and Baby Boo, Luna Park's favorite elephants, dragging their chains and steel holding stakes, provided an early morning thrill for Coney Island when the force of their stampede for the coconut grove knocked over a small tent which sheltered circus performers.

"Attired in their night clothing, members of the Richards circus troupe discovered the elephants and a chase ensued.

"Pleasure seekers at the amusement park had given the elephant a taste of the coconuts they had won at coconut grove and Big Alice and Baby Boo decided to get some themselves for they were headed for the coconut storeroom.

"Led by Paul Johanning, the lion tamer, the two big elephants were corralled. They will be locked in the barn back of Luna in the future."

The following letter concerning Jules Turnour, the clown, will be interesting reading especially to the older citizens for it was forty years ago last spring that Jules Turnour and I started in the circus business with the Burr Robbins show. His sis-



Lithograph advertising the 1918 Ringling Bros. spec. Cincinnati Art Museum collection.

ter, Millie Turnour, was the high class balancing trapeze woman. She was one of the highest class salaried women in the business in her day. Something like fifteen years ago, she appeared in Janesville as one of the features of the great Ringling show:

"Jules Turnour, postmaster of Ringlingville, is in the eyes of many, 'a man without a country.' Spaniards think him Spanish; Russians assume he must have once been a subject of the czar; Italians admire the manner in which he speaks their language; Frenchmen have taken him for a fellow countryman and it would never occur to an Englishman to question his nationality.

"As a matter of fact, Turnour is one hundred percent American and has long claimed Michigan as his state.

Turnour, however, was born in Italy of French and Spanish parents. His father and mother were traveling with a European caravan when he joined them. The first twenty years of his life were spent in touring European countries. In this way he learned all languages.

"The young man then came to America to engage in pantomime but, after two seasons, returned to Europe. Finally he came here to remain. For almost thirty years Turnour has been postmaster with Ringling Brothers. In addition he has always played an important role in the circus spectacles. This season he is a leading character in the pantomime of knight-hood, "In Days of Old."

"Probably no other post office in America is daily visited by such a crowd of cosmopolitans as that over which Turnour presides in Ringlingville. More than 1,300 people go there for their mail."

While the great Ringling show is making its way west, the state of Wisconsin will only be honored by two stops, in Milwaukee August 29th, and in Madison August 30th, with a possibility that on their way back, Janesville may be considered.

August 3, 1918

On Wednesday morning accompanied by some friends we motored to Rockford with two objects in view, the main object being to see the great Ringling show, and the other to motor through the grounds of the cantonment, for this was the first chance we had to take a look at the great work that Uncle Sam has been doing in so short a time. This sight alone was certainly worth going miles to see, and as we had plenty of time, we took in everything and even got a peek at the German prisoners, some of whom are always at work on some of Uncle Sam's farms. When our sightseeing was finished, we found a shady place where we could spread our tablecloth and in a few minutes we were devouring the

eats such as cannot be secured in a hotel or a restaurant.

We then motored to the show grounds which were something like nine miles away, only to find it was impossible for the great show to give a street parade. In fact, they were so short of help that it was 2:30 before the doors of the big show were thrown open. They corralled the cages then with a sidewall around them, but did not put up the big menagerie top, only the one where the performances were given. The show had a very large crowd in the the great tent was taken and at afternoon. Practically every seat in 3:15 [Johnny] Agee, the equestrian director, blew his whistle and the great show was on.

The great spectacle of this season, which I consider the greatest one ever given under canvas, is entitled "In Ye Olden Times" [In Days of Old] The beautiful wardrobe, the hundreds of high class dancing girls and the beautiful music in this act make you feel as though you had the worth of your money, but this is only the opening performance of the great show which is to follow for more than two hours. All this time while one act is leaving the ring, another is coming in. As I had seen the show at its opening in the Coliseum in Chicago in the spring, I left my party to enjoy the performance and went back to he

Lou Graham.



ome old friends and met new ones, and later around to the side shows, where I can always find some old friends to visit with.

I had a long visit with my old friend, Lew Graham, known as "the man with the voice." He makes all the announcements in the big top, has charge of the side shows, and, in fact, is certainly one of the hardest workers around the show. But Lew has been in the business for years and knows well how to take hold and when to let go, so that his work comes so easy to him that you would think he was on vacation and having more fun than anyone. He was selling tickets in front of a side show while I was visiting with him, when an old lady came up and, looking over her glasses, inquired the price. Lew told her "25 cents, Madame, to see this wonderful side show." The old lady shook her head and said: "Not for me, young man, not for me. I never paid more than 10 cents to go to a side show in my life and I have seen all the best ones." "Well, mother," said Lew, "when you paid 10 cents to go to the side show, you were selling your eggs for 6 cents per dozen and those you brought in today you got 45 cents for.

"In those days you paid 10 cents for pork chops and today 32 cents. And then, mother, you never saw a troupe of trained oysters in your life." The old lady said: "No, I never did and I don't believe you have them in your show." "Well," said Lew, "we have not, but we are expecting the group every day." This is one of the best side shows. It is up to date and is always looking for the greatest novelties in the world. But the old lady shook her head and said that there was never a side show in the world that was worth 25 cents, and said to Lou: "Look at that big show! War tax! War tax! Can't go anywhere without costing a lot of money. I think, Mister, I will go home and wait until times adjust themselves and then the price of your great side show will be 10 cents, just as it should be."

Many of the great acts in the big show this year are new to the public and made a great hit Wednesday in



The woodchoppers were a feature of the 1918 Ringling show. Pfening Archives.

Rockford. The giant woodchoppers who each fell a tree the same second, made a great hit with the people. The great bareback riding of May Wirth was the crowning feature of the show, and the applause that she received was deafening. You could hear the people say "That is the greatest riding act I have ever seen."

I had talks with nearly all the boys in the different departments around the show and they all had the same hard luck story--short of help--late going out and late coming into town. Joe Miller, the property man, one of the best men around the show has a quota of 85 men when in full strength. While he is short many men, his work, consisting of the poles, ropes and nets of the great aerial artists, have to be adjusted just so, and the show is never opened until Joe has everything just exactly as it should be.

One thing that keeps the show moving with accuracy is the fact that at the head of all departments there are old men who have been there for years and late and early are always on the job. In many towns it is absolutely impossible to give a parade, which is a great disappointment to the public, although the people are willing to make the best of the fact as they know the great hard-

ships the men have to go through in order to get the tents up ready for the performances. It would be difficult to get hundreds of people together in any other business who are as loyal as they are with the circus. When the show is late, all connected with it take hold and are willing to work late and early for its benefit.

On our arrival at the show, we were greeted by Edward Norwood, the genial press agent, who is always looking out for the best interests of visitors. He took us in charge, gave us the best seats in the house and saw to it that

our every want was supplied. Ed has visited in Janesville with the show many times and asked several questions about the welfare of friends he had made here while in the business. Mr. Norwood is one of the "year-around" men and is always to be found at the winter quarters in Baraboo, getting his department up to date for the coming year.

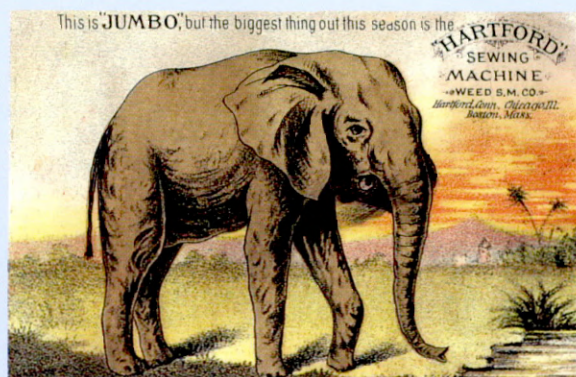
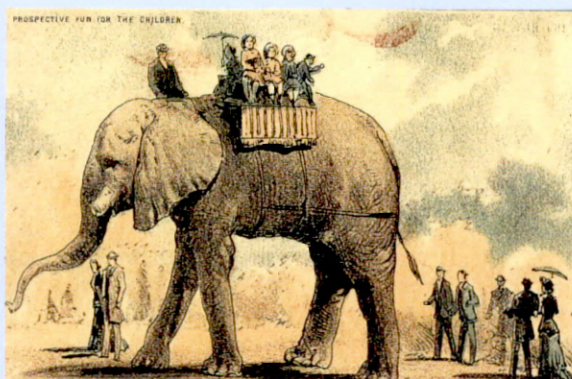
"I think I have the honor of being the first clown to arrive in France as I arrived in port Dec. 27, 1917," writes Earl Shipley. "I thought I had seen lots of mud on different circus lots, but nothing can compare with the mud of northern France. Amusements are rather scarce over here, except for the Y.M.C.A., movies, entertainments, etc. Miss Elsie Janis is touring the camps under direction of the Y.M.C.A. and is truly a riot. Her work is just the thing to cheer up the soldiers. I received letters from quite a few of my old friends, and most of them send papers at the same time. 'Somewhere in France' is a lonesome place at best and a letter is like having a chat with an old friend.

I have just learned that Henry Allen, clown, last season with the Patterson-Gollmar circus, is over here in the Canadian Army, and I am mailing him some papers. I'd be glad to get the address of any circus people doing their bit over here, and we might arrange to meet."

Shipley is with the 163rd Ambulance Co., A.P.O. 716, A.E.F.

JUMBO PICTURE CARDS

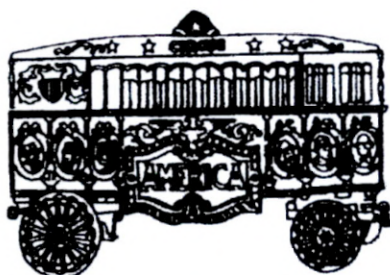
Jumbo, the giant African elephant who toured with the Barnum and London Circus from 1882 until his death in 1885, was without doubt the greatest four footed attraction ever exhibited on an American circus. The Barnum show's profits were up 50% in Jumbo's first year, the troupe clearing \$602,000 that season, the equivalent of about \$11,500,000 today. Jumbo became a favorite on trade cards, a popular advertising medium that was collected as baseball cards are today. While circuses had used them for about ten years by 1882, no known Jumbo cards advertised the Barnum company or any other field show. In the selection below we find Jumbo promoting sewing machines, furniture, clothing, and Castoria. These cards represent a small fraction of the different designs featuring Jumbo.



SANTA'S SPECTACULAR CIRCUS, CARNIVAL & OTHER AMUSEMENTS MEMORABILIA SHOW

**Saturday, Sept. 17, 2005
9 AM - 2 PM**

**Located in
Woodland Park Community Center
2100 Willow Creek Rd.
Portage, IN**



**Admission is \$3.50
Children under 12 Free w/Adult
For further information
708-895-1502 9-6 M-F**



This show is for memorabilia from Circuses, Carnivals, Side Shows, Vaudeville, Fairs, Amusement Parks, Clowns and Magic Acts. Types of items which may be at the show: programs, tickets, photos, props, rides, posters, side show exhibits, clowns, magic tricks, souvenirs, models and accessories, clown dolls and toys. So come to the show where you can relive the past and present wonders of the amusement world as you wander past items which you can touch and examine before buying.

SPECIAL FEATURES

We are proud to have JOEY KELLY, a clown himself and the grandson of world famous clown EMMETT KELLY. Joey will be doing a half hour performance and will be available to meet fans before and after the performance.

The Calumet Clowns will also be here to do face painting & balloon animals for children of all ages.